

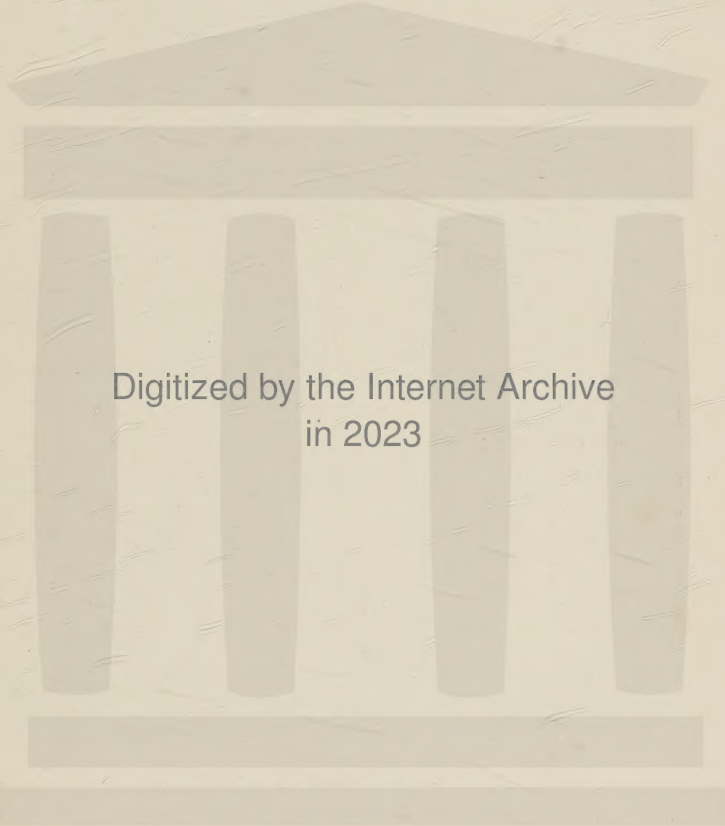
BRIMSTONE AND CHILI

THE
UNITED STATES AND
MEXICO

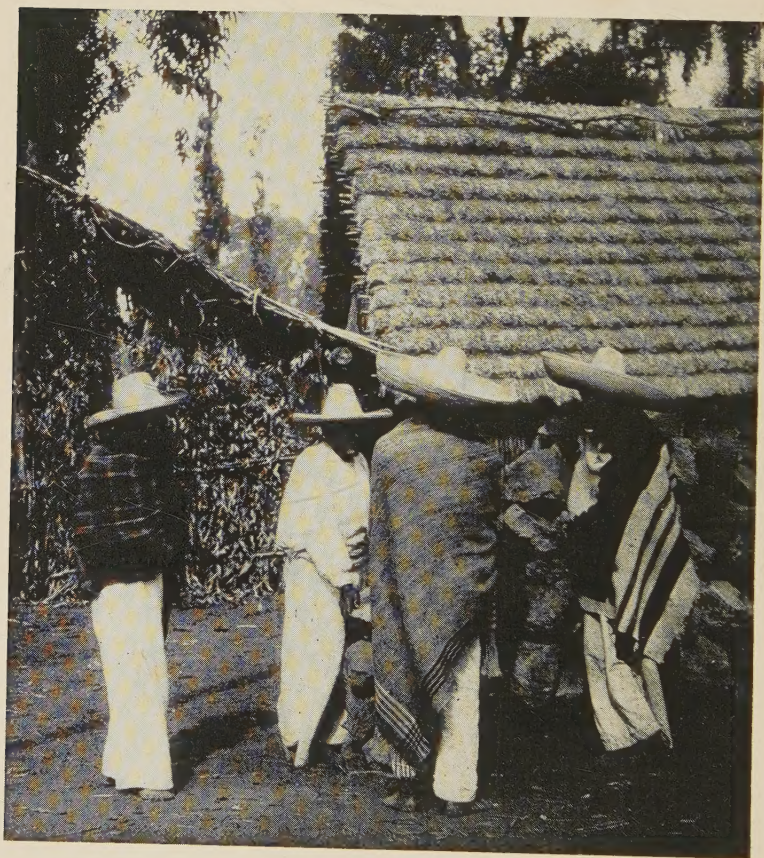
by J. F. Rippy

Professor Rippy's excellent survey should be read above all by newspaper editors and by those who desire to make an intelligent approach to what in this country is denominated 'the Mexican problem' and by our neighbors is felt to be 'the Yankee Peril.'

—*Ernest Gruening in The Nation.*



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MEXICAN VILLAGERS

BRIMSTONE AND CHILI

A Book of Personal
Experiences in the
Southwest and
in Mexico

BY CARLETON BEALS



New York
ALFRED · A · KNOPF
1927

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TO
"LAS CULEBRAS DE LA PERLA"
IN THE CAFÉ OF CARTOONS

*El viajero de proa me dice:
¿Que vas a buscar
si en la tierra no espera la dicha?
¡No sé contestar!*

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BRIMSTONE AND CHILI

CHAPTER I

FANNIE TO THE ROAD

I

"'Tis a face to scare the babes in the cradles," Mike laughed. His brogue made the beer glasses dance.

To tell the truth, Michael O'Shaughnessy wasn't handsome. His wide smile disclosed yellow horse-teeth and a gap where two incisors were missing, "knocked out by a belayin' pin in the old days in a dirty two-master poundin' round the Horn." Mike's hair stood up like prophylactic tooth-brush bristles, carrot-red above a tobacco complexion, veined with heavy drinking. But he had gay, reckless blue eyes, full of Celtic fantasy. At forty, when I knew him, he was a rollicking, two-fisted devil, still foot-loose. Gesture and word carried the fragrance of distant lands. To believe him, his adventures had been more exciting than those of Ahab, Cellini, and Marco Polo rolled into one super-buccaneer. He was *Wanderlust* personified.

At the tough age of twelve he had run away from the peat and the pigs and the grass-roofed hut of his father in Connaught to seek his fortunes in Dublin. Mike had since sailed in every sort of craft on every sea to every nook of the world. He had reefed sails on sloops and harpooned on whalers, had shovelled coal on tankers and stood look-out on ice-bound wind-jammers. Somewhere in the South Seas he had married a native princess. In the Klondike he had made a fortune, only to lose it in the dance-halls and gambling-dives

of Dawson. He had reached Frisco with just two dollars and eighty-five cents with which to stimulate "the music of jaws on an honest-to-God beefsteak." He had worked in mines near Quito and had "thrown his feet for a feed" in Buenos Aires.

When I met him, his most treasured possession (which later became mine) was a creased, yellow map of the Río Yaqui in Sonora, Mexico, on the back of which were scribbled with indelible pencil explicit directions for finding a cache of gold.

"All me life," he declared, as he spread this out before my eager eyes, "all me life, 'tis incense and candles I've burnt before the good Saint Joseph, patron of trav'lers, who keeps a squint on a man when he's on the road far from the old country."

This was nearly ten years ago, but those days when Michael O'Shaughnessy and I sat at the rum-scented table in Kravaz's cellar on the Frisco water-front (I with my stein of beer and he with his whisky straight) are as warm and sharply etched in my mind as the face of my beloved. Many a day and night since, I have known conviviality and have sat over queer tables in queer joints, in a dozen marts of the world, but none is so clearly thrown on the screen of my memory as those nights with Michael O'Shaughnessy in the dusky cellar of Kravaz's, with its smoked ceiling and grimy panes and sawdust floor and faded Pabst-beer calendar. Mike promised to show me the world. "We'll go prospectin'," said Mike, "like the ramblin' wrecks of poverty we are, an' then we'll hit whatever trail we've a mind, and to hell with 'em all, for Michael O'Shaughnessy's not the lad to stick around one shanty fer long. I'm no shenanigan slave to some fish-faced trull with a sharp tongue, or some putty-faced boss with no more guts than a stinkin' starfish. It's no pair of soft seductive arms that'll be holdin' Michael

O'Shaughnessy when he's a mind to be goin' where he damn pleases."

Stein after stein would flow down my throat. The Pabst calendar, with its not quite bare Pleiades prancing down the Milky Way, turned from faded yellow to a delectable rose tint. And Mike hammered on the table and shouted of fist fights on the wharves of Papeete in Tahiti, or of a blizzard upon the upper Yukon, or a typhoon off the coast of Formosa; and of the cache of gold we should find in Sonora.

Late in May Mike entrusted his precious map to me. "I've a queer hunch," he told me, "that somethin's goin' to happen to little Mike. Fate's an upper-cuttin' sonnabitch, an' yez never can tell. 'Tis the same feelin' I was after havin' in me chest goin' on fifteen y'ars ago, when I was grub-stakin' out o' Phoenix acrost the worst bit o' desert yez ever glimmed, an', sure enough, I was laid up four turrible weeks with the blasted typhoid. Begorra an' yez never can tell. Besides 'tis a reckless bugger I am, an' yez 'd better keep it safe, fer I c'n see, yez 're a careful sort o' guy."

His words foreshadowed Fate! Two weeks later Mike died there in Kravaz's giving a toast to the ladies and to the South Sea princess; "fer, man alive, she had arrums loik waves an' breasts loik the sun." He just crumpled up and went over like a sack of spuds.

But for me Mike's spirit went marching on. All spring I was haunted by Mike's *Wanderlust*. Every day I scanned the yellow map, at night on the cars, in the office, often in the midst of a column of figures on the adding-machine. I was at that time a white-collar slave in the shipping department of the Standard Oil Company; my job, to ship canned speed to the benighted, lazy heathen of remote, backward lands. But I chafed under the yoke. Ever since college the great American duty of work and success — clock-punching, column-adding, push, and bluff — had held me in its iron

claws, but never had commanded my reverence. Always mine has been a singular love for vagrants, panhandlers, dyed-in-the-wool villains and booze-fighters. And now my goaded fancies flocked on a hit-or-miss trail to outlandish spots. Every outgoing drum of petroleum carried my thoughts with it to tropic seas and palm-shaded shores. I laboured assiduously at the office, but haunting, unknown faces and places rayed out from every notation on my data sheets. Every column of figures had to be done three times over; my reports came back from the head office decorated with red ink and affixed to sarcastic letters of reproof.

The big storm, Berkeley's famous, unheralded storm, came in July. No old resident had ever heard of a thunder-storm in Berkeley in July — or in any other month for that matter. But that night a martial gale whipped up from the Ocean of Peace and tore its way through the Golden Gate; a blast of thunder shook me out of bed and brought me to the window to watch the jagged lightning over the hills. For hours, long after the storm had died away, dreams of wild adventure kept me huddled there, unconscious of the shivering cold, looking out at the black, wet night of the Berkeley heights. I had a great desire to push the tight walls apart. I longed to grapple with storm and with hardships and feel the open trail beneath my feet.

The following morning I telegraphed the shipping office, notifying my boss I had quit. I went out in the back yard to look at Fannie, my second-hand Ford. For the first time I noticed with real satisfaction that she had a queer gipsy leer, a certain lurch of female wantonness. Obviously her rust, bent fenders, rattly top, and all her other improprieties were the outcome of a gadabout temperament and many base amours. Fannie must have been brought into the world with all the proper etiquette and shiny enamel, but had since known too many masters to have retained her virginal

bloom. Instead of bloom, Fannie had temperament, as I learned only too harrowingly in the chase she soon led me.

That same day, in great haste, still fearful of the enslaving luxury of walls and the tentacles of my office routine, I bought the requisite accoutrements — knife, flash-light, compass, revolver, whisky for snake-bite, gasolene. A little over a hundred dollars in my pocket, I bade kith and kin good-bye and cranked up Fannie.

My first stop was my cousin's ranch, south of San José, where my twenty-year-old brother, Ralph, was spending his summer vacation. I found him sitting in front of the bunk-house, making noises on a trombone for the edification of an admiring circle of hands, buff Orpington chickens, pigs, and a distressed dog. I had come to say good-bye but he soon convinced me that a cache of gold in Sonora was more important than a college education; or rather that a college education would prove an easy matter if the cache was located.

II

We climbed over the Coast Range into the San Joaquin Valley — a shifting panorama of orchards, checkered grain-fields and farm-houses tucked snugly in the folds of the hills. A wrenched wheel in a gully road, tire trouble, a blistering hot, mosquito-infested night; but by the following afternoon we were bowling along towards Bakersfield. Earth and air grew hotter and hotter. The country became barer and flatter. The sun lowered over the naked, red alkaline fields and stretched long shadows from the dismal, black oil-derricks; the heat blazed and quivered about us uncannily, like shadow bands before an eclipse.

Two days later, a new wheel on Fannie, and having provided ourselves with a liberal supply of beans, rice, flour, sugar, bacon, flapjack meal, dried fruit, tinned meat, and

vegetables, we shuffled out of Bakersfield in the fine velvety dawn toward Tehachapi Pass, where the Sierra Nevada and the Coast Range converge. Steadily we ascended toward these grim mountains. They rose, dull indigo against the rim of morning red, up, up into the hard, glass-like sky. Occasionally the road dipped; the mountains disappeared and the black derricks of the oil-wells pricked the faint eastern glow — black, mutilated fingers against the flushed face of the dawn. Behind us — glimpses of the low houses of Bakersfield, glints of silver from window-panes and skylights; far to the west — the sheen of Lake Kern; to the north — an isolated peak, Mount Breckenridge, stood out boldly. We wound ever up along gashed, red road-cuts over rolling stony hills, mangy with mesquit and sagebrush; through a series of sparse, cactus-clad canyons. Here and there a lone wooden house set on a slope among eucalyptus or cottonwood-trees poked out of the shimmering heat waves, breaking the monotonous emptiness. Higher up, the vegetation became less scant. Dusty weeds drooped along the road-side, but even here the thirsty-looking flowers, earthy red and yellow, were vivid symbols of heat and drought.

Past the divide the road curved down-grade. Through a sudden break in the mountains we stared across a bewildering chaos of barren crags, lone buttes — a vast sweep of desolation stretching illimitably into the haze of the dim horizon.

The desert!

The never-never land!

Far as the eye could reach, an endless surge of sand and alkali and cactus and splintered bony crags!

The stark, cruel desert that was to hold us in its bondage for long weeks to come! To both of us at that moment came a dire premonition of the hardship and privation we were

later to face. We parked the car in the factitious shade of a dwarfed, feathery pepper-tree to gaze out across this boundless void. The heat from this glowing desolation struck our blistering faces like a furnace blast.

At another turn of the road the town of Mojave sprawled below us on the empty sweep of the desert floor. To it ran four sets of gleaming tracks, marked by long lines of telegraph poles — Mojave meant cool drinks and a few minutes of shade on the store platform under the wooden roof.

Out of Mojave the long road to Barstow stretched before us — literally a track, not a road — two ruts wriggling through the endless sands, sands which grew deeper every mile. But further on spread the dry lake-beds — miles of hard, level, glass-like surface, perfect as macadam. Here the temptation to speed seized us. We touched fifty miles an hour. A loud report. A vertiginous skidding! A blow-out!

Three-thirty! The afternoon blazing around us! The thermometer at 112° ! Muscles stiff, bodies sore from Fannie's lurching and jolting, we crawled out to mend the tire. Rim and tools were red-hot from the heat, blistering our hands. After much perspiring, cursing, and false footholds in the sand, after pumping for a back-breaking eternity, we got the tire repaired.

Thereafter we were wise enough to test the pressure every few hours, especially on beyond the dry lake-beds, when we struck sand again.

That night the sun went down in a bath of blood. We drove late, but the faint breeze raised by our passing remained hot and searing. And even at ten o'clock, when a bad stretch of road made further travel infeasible, the sands were still uncomfortably warm to the touch. We pulled out the cushions and lay down under the myriad stars — great silver baubles swinging in the soft night heavens, twice the size of stars dimmed by the proximity of city lights, or

blurred by city dust. The clear air and the vast expanse of sand brought all the celestial bodies close to hand — intimate, throbbing things. I stared up at them, and they stared me out of countenance. In spite of the heat Ralph was soon sound asleep, but I could not close my eyes. To get cool I stripped off all my clothes and lay there watching the night. Far off, the profile of a black ridge sawed a jagged line; near by, the weird shaggy arms of a Jordan palm, with sabre-like leaves, watched us like some fantastic pagan monstrosity.

— And silence! — The great silence! — An all-enfolding silence. — At times an almost smothering silence! As though all of life had died! As though we had suddenly been transported to a dead planet. I lay there, ears avid for sound, but all I sensed was the beat of blood in my temples. Then, after a time, tiny rustlings. Incredible, uncanny rustlings, dim creaks without rhyme or reason. Quite unable to sleep, I sat up and smoked. The heat still scalded my nerves. But gradually a slight movement of air and, as the temperature dropped, a vast peace stole over me, like the calm of opium. Yet my senses remained sharply, excruciatingly alert. I puffed on my pipe to drown out those tiny rustlings. The stars made my tired eyeballs ache almost as much as the sun and heat and alkaline sand had done during the day, but a caressed sort of ache — the tingling, half-pleasurable pain of nerves stirred into too greedy life, and yet, at the same time, a gradual enveloping peace — the great silence, the great emptiness! But the mind rejects silence, emptiness, the *nulla*. And though the long, flat surface of the earth lay unbroken by shadows, it had its elevations and depressions, and these suddenly seemed shadows, till a hundred phantoms came stalking, creeping, prowling around me. Weariness made my limbs heavy; yet my mind remained atrociously active, peopling the empty void with ghosts, the ghosts of the past: Michael O'Shaughnessy, my mother, girls I had kissed, the ghosts of books —



SAND, SUN, AND CACTUS



THE NEVER-NEVER LAND

Aloysha, Captain Kidd, Madame Bovary, Tess of the D'Urbervilles; and the ghosts of the future, the ghosts of people treading the lands I had yet to see.

A spark from my pipe fell on the back of my hand. I left it there, enjoying its sharp sting as it slowly turned black. For a time I turned my eyes from the blazing stars and the far mountains to watch the homely glow in the bowl of my pipe.

Presently the moon slipped over a sharp, sombre hill. Blood-red, it oozed up as some gelatinous matter squeezed in the hand. It assumed shape, for a moment became a massive cauldron of fire; then its rim broke loose from the mountain silhouette. Like a huge toy balloon it bobbed into the air and stopped quiveringly, as though held by some invisible thread. Slowly it rose, growing silver. White glory sparkled on the countless sands about us. The floor of the world was like mercury shaken slightly, pulsing, shimmering. A coyote howled — far off — a thin, heart-wavering quaver.

That night ghosts stalked in my sleep.

III

Morning! On to Barstow and Needles! An endless blaze of sand and copper sky. The desert was depopulated. Only twice did we meet anyone on the road: once an auto, gray with dust, and, near Needles, a gang of swarthy Mexicans working on the tracks. They halted their listless shovelling to watch us pass and to take long drinks from a barrel of water on a hand-car. All the long way we whirled past the wrecks of auto cars, derelicts of the desert, some of them but heaps of blackened iron and steel. Here and there lay the bleaching, yellow bones of animals that had perished. The journey was one long glaring texture — an intolerable spangled flare, as of the shimmering gown of some super-earthly princess. Long, throat-parching hours at the wheel alter-

nated with nights of incandescent glory; dawns of cool purple delight followed by the ruthless surge of the molten sun-disk above the jagged horizon.

Time after time we crossed dry washes, seared, flat river-bottoms, and bumped over boulders bleaching in the sun, like bones. Sharp gullies cut and criss-crossed this entire region. They are the product of the desert storms. Rain in the Mojave comes in cloud-bursts. For a few hours the river-beds are boiling torrents. Then the water miraculously disappears, and once more the same intolerable sun burns over stone and sand and vagrant greasewood stalk. But we saw no sign of rain, only that eternal blaze — a dithyramb of hot earth and hot sky, an oven-like world in which the heat-waves shuttled violently from heaven to earth and back again in an interminable, wearying, meaningless pattern. The mountains here are not connected ridges, but isolated outcropping of barren, jagged rock. From the distance these cruel crags rise directly from the flat floor of the desert. Closer approach, however, reveals a gradual slope — no foot-hills, but a long sweep of sand that suddenly metamorphoses into reddish rock, eaten into by sharp gullies and ravines broken by long scars of sliding gravel, licked by hot, white tongues of all-enveloping heat. These mountains here are one stupendous phantasmagoria of colour, Plutonic masses varying in tint from hour to hour: purple, indigo, violet, rose, heliotrope. Sometimes they fade to a muddy green or a dull, earthy shade; sometimes they are a lurid glow that flares into reddish flames on the near horizon.

And always the mystery! The Unknown! The great Silence! The imminence of Death! For Death is the Caliban of these regions, though he takes on the alluring, precious aspects of Ariel — the far vista with its glitter and shimmer and waves of heat; the liquid mirages, the tooth-like rocky buttes, hold forth a terrible fascination, a seductiveness, a lyric fierceness. This was the country we were to face.

CHAPTER II

BRIMSTONE AND CHILI

I

SOUTH of Needles the road swings into Arizona across the Colorado River, here a broad, sluggish stream, peaceful at last, sated with its up-country turbulence and pregnant with yellow silt. But the much-needed bath we had hoped to get at this point was out of the question; a dip into these muggy waters would have baptized us into the yellow race. We drove on and at noon lay up in a little grove of pepper- and cottonwood-trees — the only shade for miles on miles to protect us from the blazing sun. Two other parties, coming west from Phoenix, had found refuge in this same haven. One was a roistering group of six, drinking heavily: three men lounging in trousers and under-shirts, three women in thin calico dresses and bare feet, submitting listlessly to the lascivious kisses of their males, or occasionally flaring into anger. One of the men invited us over to drink, but the general mood of the party was too ugly. We declined. The other campers were a plump Jewish business man and his plumper wife. She lay panting, in her chemise, her flabby breast half exposed. At our approach she made a half-hearted move to cover herself, but soon relapsed into a doze. Her husband fanned away the flies from her flushed face with a newspaper. They had lain up five days with a broken rear axle of a Dodge and expected to wait another week. He peppered the recital of his troubles with solemn curses, in the middle of which he would break off into excited Yiddish to get the confirmation

of his sleeping, irritable wife. "Never again, never again," was his song. "De road is hell von here to de east, de vay I vas coming. Never again vill I try it, never again!"

Our grove, sunk in a hollow, offered shade, but cut off all breeze. The hot air hung and crackled over us. Our eyeballs ached and withered before the dancing blaze of the billowing flame-world about. The sky was a glassy glare. The white links of heat held us chained under the trees until the sun had wheeled low in the west.

It was hours after the fiery ball had sunk below the earth when we reached the shacks and tents and barking dogs of the town called Yucca. Here we routed from his bed the sole store-keeper to get gasoline. Inquiries about the roads called forth expert, dogmatic advice. A loose-hung, big-jointed, tobacco-chewing miner in blue jeans informed us that the best road ran north-east through Kingman to Prescott, thence to Phoenix — a vast arc of two hundred and fifty miles — but that there was a more direct route south — from Kingman close around the Hualapai Mountains, which loomed massive and sombre to the east of us; or we could cut along a road not shown on our map, around the far end of Bates Peak to Alamo. Sixty miles would see us in Alamo, a hundred in Wenden. This last was the shortest route south and fairly good. "Not so bad, not so bad," he declared with a prodigious important spit, that cracked on a rock.

At dawn the following morning we set out on this shortest route, thankful for anything that would lessen the distance to the Yaqui River. For the first fifteen miles the road was fair, as desert roads go. After that it became a torture of sharp declivities and washed-out ruts, of gravel and sand and boulders and gullies. Painfully we nosed over the barren mountains. At times our path was but an eroded, slanting shelf, clinging to the side of the cliff, where a skid of the wheels would have plunged us hundreds of feet to our death. We

crawled along the side of the steep ravine and struck a stretch thick with boulders. The body of the car creaking, top rattling, we picked our way laboriously, jolting over ledge and buttress. The hand brake jammed on a big rock — out of commission for the rest of the trip. We plunged down, down a storm-eaten track to the bed of a canyon, full into a sandy wash, and stuck deep!

The car would not budge. We raced the engine futilely, cursing the yokel back in Yucca who stood with his hands in his blue jeans comfortably and authoritatively informing us this road was "not so bad, not so bad." We tried again and again to get free. Our rear wheels spun around in the sand, but the machine wouldn't move an inch. We dug out the sand in front of the wheels and piled in rocks, but the rocks whirled out of place. The sand was bottomless. We dug another trench and tried flinging down stones, then gunny sacks, even a coat. Sacks and coat were torn to shreds. One of us handled the wheel; the other put his shoulder to the machine. Nothing happened. The heat was overpowering. After each effort we sat down to mop our faces and gather energy for another try. Our racing engine burned up gasoline faster than Michael O'Shaughnessy could drink whisky. The sand ate through our new tires as though they were of tissue-paper. We worked feverishly. But the wheels wouldn't budge — not an inch.

We faced the gloomy prospect of having to abandon our machine and supplies, and foot it to the nearest point, God only knew how far off. Our expedition promised to be a fizzle. The cache of gold in Sonora became remote, probably unattainable. Failure flouted us. The heat stripped our nerves raw. My brother and I began quarrelling viciously. At each attempt to extricate the machine we no longer damned the miner in blue jeans; we damned each other. For two hours, at least two hours, we worked like benevolent demons, and

then — a tiny change of angle, a few inches gained. Renewed hope! We persevered. Wheels spinning, inch by inch we crawled out of the wash and landed with a rattle of fenders on rockier ground.

We now followed the trackless river-bottom, keeping on the rocks and avoiding the sand. Nowhere could we get up the steep banks. It looked as if we had missed the trail altogether. But at last a faint track led over a low spur. We roared up the steep slope, muffler wide open, bumped over some gullied, stone shelvings and landed on solid soil. We swung on along the high ridges of the Artillery Mountains. Our water gave out. Our gasoline was perilously low, one tire in rotten shape, our whole outfit down at the wheels. We couldn't hold out much longer. Weary, our thoughts continually drawn to our thirst, we drove on and on, alternating frequently at the wheel. Then, at last, after nosing along the edge of another cliff, the road slipped sharply down grade and improved rapidly.

II

About four o'clock we spied a group of low mine buildings on a flat shoulder of hill and, far beyond, a sweeping desert mesa fading into dim blue mountains. We whirled down in a cloud of acrid dust before the yellow, screened-in mess-house.

Water! We drank the well dry, dipper after dipper of cool water. The cook invited us in. He heaped our crockery plates with cold meats and enormous slices of green-iced cake — a most venomous green. He dragged about the kitchen in his drawers and under-shirt, a mammoth welter of sluggish flesh — a gross, puffed body, fat arms batting at the flies, thick as raisins in a custard. He kept saying over and over to himself: "Hot as brimstone and chili, hot as brimstone and chili!"

More confidentially he said: "Don't never be no cook. An' don't never come to any lousy mining-camp, where there ain't no women, and no shows; just a hell of a lot o' buzzin' flies. Flies — flies — ~~god~~ dam these flies." He threshed his beefy arms about him desperately. "Jesus Christ Almighty, they gets in your nose, they gets in your ears, an' they gets in your soup. They're more pestiferous than a skirt when you've got a bit of dough in your jeans.

"Don't be no cook, my boys; don't be no cook in a lousy mine what's hotter 'n brimstone an' chili. — An' don't never trust no Mex. That yellow-bellied Pepe wot works this mine, he traded me a no-count watch for a blame good knife an' a bran-new belt; an' when I give him three bucks to buy me a shirt in Prescott, he sez he lost 'em on the way. — Some day I'll rip his guts right out'n him."

The cook whetted a big knife on the sole of his boot and cut off extra helpings of roast beef. "All I c'n say to you two kids is don't never be no cook, an' don't never work in no lousy Arizona mine, where it's hotter'n brimstone an' chili. An' don't never trust no Mex. Damn that bow-legged, dirt-eating Pepe anyhow." The cook mopped his red forehead, stirred in a copper kettle with a long, wooden spoon, and yawned like a rhinoceros, exposing loose, scummy teeth. "I don't know where you two's headed for, but you listen to what I been tellin' you, an' you won't be sorry, not by a jugful. By God, I'll get that yellow-bellied Pepe yet. What you two kids otta do is skeddadle back home an' git an' edication. Don't go lopin' around the desert in a ham-sandwich Ford for God knows where. I used to have religion oncet, afore I came to this hole, but no God what respects hisself 'd bother to make a bit o' country like this, hotter'n brimstone an' chili, wot looks worser'n an old hag, wrinkled, without any teeth in her jaws. What you kids want 's an edication. Here, have some more o' this here cake. 'Tain't worth

a lead nickel nohow, but it's the greenest thing inside a thousand miles, so yous had better cram up on it. Yes, edication — don't be no cook, an' —— ”

We excused ourselves — “ Tire trouble.”

Under the critical eyes and jocular tongues of a group of miners we repaired the most pressing damages to Fannie.

“ Say, sonny, why don't you tie a string to the radiator and pull it? ”

Another rattled the fender. “ Say, fellows, never thought we'd get no free brass band out in this hole. Let's hear sum-pin' soft and pashnate.”

A third. “ Who sold it to you anyhow? Ikey, the junk-man? ”

Loud guffaws as I dignifiedly crawled under the machine.

III

We swung back up to the dry road, our fateful road. The big cook came to the door, meat chopper in hand, to wave his apron at us. He kept yelling after us: “ You two kids 'd better skedaddle back home an' git an edication. — ”

A straight shoot down to the Ben Williams River, a sluggish stream winding around the foot of red bluffs. With a shout we had our clothes off and were splashing in the cool water. And though dusk came on, we washed our dirty clothes, hanging them over the bushes to dry.

The moon came up, a bulging white disk, like a watch-crystal with a little stem of cloud.

Just enough gas to reach Alamo, half a mile farther on. A little store and post office dominated a fork in the road and the baker's dozen of houses under the cottonwood-trees. As machines rarely came this way, the store carried no gasoline. Only one man in Alamo owned a car, a Ford runabout, and

he had only five gallons in his tank, brought from Wenden, twenty odd miles on the other side of the mountains. Out of sheer pity and only after much urging would he agree to share his supply.

The next day, more trouble! Hardly had we run two miles when the right front tire, cut through the previous day in the sand, blew out with a loud bang. The usual labour, blistering contacts with metals, pumping up, profanity. Four times in three hours this same tire blew out.

This finished us. The last time we kept grimly on. The tire whipped loose, but we bumped recklessly along on the rim, using up gasoline at a great rate. Through Cunningham Pass in the Harcouver Mountains; then a long sandy stretch. Topping a slight rise in the road, we coasted down to within a quarter of a mile of a cabin set against the side of a bare, yellow hill, and stuck. The engine coughed, sighed, and died. No more gas!

And no way to get more except in Wenden, ten miles off. To lug a five-gallon can of gasoline on the shoulder for ten miles under the blazing sun — a twenty-mile trip in all — was at least a day's hard toil. A most enticing prospect! We gazed about us over the endless miles of dreary, dust-covered chaparral. A buzzard wheeled over the yellow hill and the cabin. In all this heat-hammered circle the cabin was the only sign of man's handiwork.

We walked down to it. An auto! In the yard stood a Studebaker, rear axle off, the body propped up on boxes. On the ground lay a scarred, Florida number-plate. A machine! Perhaps gasoline on the premises. We investigated the cabin. Locked! The windows were carefully boarded up. Thick dust had drifted over the rear stoop. The chickens in the coop beyond looked half starved. We threw them some cracker crumbs, then climbed up to a mine shaft in the hill near by. From here we got a glimpse of Wenden, a fleck of gold on

the sea of shimmering bone-white heat. We made another circle of the house. Not a sign of gasolene. The Studebaker was our last hope. We looked into the tank. Full to the brim! We took what we needed and, to salve our consciences, fed the chickens again.

CHAPTER III

BURROS

I

WENDEN is a typical desert town; ramshackle buildings along a dreary Main Street swept by sand-storms — a blistered, seared outpost, alongside of which Gopher Prairie is paradise. Once off the road our shoes sank over the tops in sand. People dragged about apathetically in the strips of shade. But the place boasted a pepper-tree, a garage, and a lunch-room. We had a regular feed — steak, French-fried, pie, and coffee — our first real “chow” since home. Belts loosened, hat brims low over our eyes, we stood on the steps, picking our teeth and staring out towards the broken, bare Harcouver Mountains we had traversed.

Our Fannie had been an expensive mistress, a pettish, temperamental creature, overfond, especially in the middle of long desolate stretches, of that internationally scandalous perfume known as gasoline and those chic galoshes known as Goodrich tires. Wenden's garage keeper, a hungry, red-haired fellow with a lascivious tongue and a weary slouch, looked her over with an air of hurt dignity. Lack of competition, plus the heat, caused him to demand practically our whole capital for refurbishing her. We were caught on the horns of our dilemma — a rehabilitated Fannie and no money for gas and grub, or money and no Fannie. In true male fashion we decided to jilt her then and there. We tried to palm her off on the garage keeper, for a small sum, telling

him we intended to transfer our supplies and blankets to burros. He listened to our plans in tired amazement, but fought shy of all entangling alliances. So we told him to keep Fannie until we returned from our prospecting trip.

His comment: "You two tenderfeet 'll get lost. You'll just naturally wander around and die; then what 'll I do with the bus?"

Should such a sad thing happen, we reassured him, we should have no great interest in Fannie's fate; he could do what he pleased with her.

He gave us a puzzled look, grunted, and taking up a monkey-wrench, crawled under a machine. We heard a series of thumps and snorts. While waiting for him to reappear, we looked at our map. We would go on south across the desert toward the Mexican border to Sonora, and from Sonora south to the Río Yaqui; allowing for topography, a distance of 750 miles — not so bad! Twenty-five miles a day; exactly a month to make it in.

Red-head crawled apathetically from under the car.

"Where can we get burros?" we propounded.

"Don't ask me." Sullenly he tossed his wrench on a workbench. "There's a few about. Only don't ask me. I'm not going to have no blame on my head. I got enough troubles already."

"Why, who owns the burros?"

Red-head wiped his grimy hands on a piece of waste. "'Tain't that. I just don't want to enter into any suicide pact with nobody. Two hours of this sun 'd knock a guy silly. You'll go wandering around like two loons."

"But who owns the burros?"

"Nobody that I knows of. They just hang around town, like cats and dogs, and eat whatever they can pick up."

"But they must belong to somebody."

Red-head grunted and crawled under another machine.

We watched his legs vibrate; then sallied forth on the main street of Wenden.

We peered about, eyes half closed from the everlasting glare. Not a living creature stirring. A mongrel cur, asleep in a corner of shade under the lunch-counter steps, dilated his nose, snapped at a fly, and went back to sleep. We waded out into the sand behind the buildings. In back of the lunch-room was a large, black burro and a small jack. The black, a female, was munching a label from a tin can. The little fellow stood beside her, head drooping, nose in her flank. Once roped, they followed us dutifully around the lunch house to Main Street.

II

A Mexican, broad sombrero cocked on the back of his head, was coming down the steps. The ends of his red kerchief, knotted about his swarthy throat, dangled on his green shirt; a cigarette drooped from the corner of his thick lips. The long rowels of the spurs strapped to his wrinkled leather boots clinked as he descended. He made a queer hissing sound to his horse, which was standing under Wenden's pepper-tree across the road. The animal plodded slowly toward him through the blistering sun, head hanging. He glanced at us, then flicked his cigarette into the sand.

"*Caramba!* What you do with them burros?"

"We're going down to the garage."

He slapped his quirt against his leg. "Who say you can? What for you want 'em?"

"We're going prospecting."

"You are, eh? Well, come over under the tree. We talk the business!" He stalked off across the street, the bridle of his horse in his hand, his spurs making little tracks in the sand. My brother and I looked at each other. We shrugged and followed him.

"Whatta I want?" His black eyes leered at us cunningly. — "My name is Pedro González, *servidor de ustedes*." He bowed, and stuck out his long thin hand ingratiatingly. Then, squatting on the ground, he took out an ugly knife, which he whetted on a large boulder. "Them's my burros, *sabe?*"

"The garage man told us they weren't anybody's."

"Garage man, he red-headed fool. He know no nothing 'cept monkey-wrench." Pedro kept on whetting his knife caressingly. "Them's my burros. They belong Pedro González. But I sell 'em you cheap."

I felt myself a true greenhorn. The garage man had told us — still the Mexican seemed so assured. Who could tell? "Let's go over to the garage," I suggested.

"Me no go. Garage man, he red-headed fool."

"Suit yourself; we're going."

Pedro leaped to his feet. "You no take my burro!" With one swish of his knife he cut our lead rope. He put his arms about the animal's neck. "Jennie, she good burro."

My blood rushed to my face. I stepped forward angrily; then remembered the knife. I looked about me. Across the road blazed the bare, wooden surfaces of the buildings. To the north stretched the dismal barren country, fading towards the flickering chocolate-coloured mountains. Heat waves bellied over the chaparral; the long road twisting through it flowed toward the mountains like a silver river. A buzzing filled my ears. The cicadas hummed their harsh, interminable sound. A yellow dust-coloured flower drooped near a fence advertising "Vegetable Compound" in faded letters. My thoughts blurred. The heat hung to us like vast, leaden weights. I tried to think, but thinking became merely a series of jerking reflections, glinting, unconnected phrases that formed and reformed in my mind without sequence. And through this incoherent, kaleidoscopic mental haze I saw

Pedro smiling at me ingratiatingly. His white teeth glinted. "Come now, how much you pay, how much? — Fifteen dollars, both of 'em, Jennie and Jack. I give you 'em fifteen dollars. Cheap! They good burros."

"Ten," I countered.

Pedro snapped up my offer. "All right. Pony up."

I pulled out my wallet. Pedro took the bill I held out disdainfully. Folding it into a small square, he stuck it in his trousers watchpocket, bowed and held out his hand to us. "Pedro, he your good frien'. No forget Pedro; he always your good frien'. Jennie, Jack, they good burros. You find much gold, *muchísimo*. *Adiós*." He swung on his cayuse and, with a long sweep of his braided sombrero, whirled down the road.

Red-head shook his head wearily at the sight of our two burros.

"We found them back of the lunch-room." I suppressed the incident with Pedro.

"Yes, they've been around here for a long time."

"Who do they belong to?"

"Nobody — anybody — Who'd want 'em? Nobody — nobody, 'cept a couple of tenderfeet. You'll go loony in this sun."

"Do you know Pedro González? He said the burros were his."

"He's a dirty liar. Don't pay no attention to him. He's a devil, always after women and looking for a scrap."

"A mean customer then?"

"Oh, not in the daylight. Only when he's lit up with too much gin. Other times Pedro wouldn't fight a sick cat."

"How much are the burros worth if one had to buy them?"

Red-head looked up from polishing a valve with emery

paper. "Not a hell of a lot. The two of 'em wouldn't fetch more 'n about five bucks. Matter of fact, you'd have to give 'em away. How you going to pack 'em?"

"Why, er, how do you pack burros?"

"You need pack-saddles. See Jim Austin — over at the lunch-counter."

Jim Austin, a tall lean "desert rat," was lounging on a box of soap in the railroad station. He spat out a stream of tobacco juice and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "Pack-saddles? I got one somewhere; blowed if I know just where. Where'd you get your burros?"

We told him. Thoughtfully he cut off another quid of tobacco and stuck it in the side of his cheek, where it looked a misplaced Adam's apple. "Those burros are mine. Can't spare 'em."

"Now, look here" — I was pretty mad — "those burros have been eating tin-can labels around here too long to belong to anybody. They're ours and we're going to use them. We may look green, but we aren't that green."

"All right, sonny. Don't get het up about it. Just a Wenden joke, that's all."

"Where can we find Pedro González?" I asked.

"Pedro!" Jim Austin's glassy eyes bulged. "Ha ha!" He suddenly guffawed. "Don't mean to say he rooked you on those burros already? Ha ha!" His head rocked on his thin shoulders. He called to another lounge on the platform. "Pedro's gyped these two nice city boys. What you know 'bout that? Beat me to it. Well, well, sonny, want your money back, huh? Fat chance! The last I seed of Pedro was a speck o' dust off thar. You'll be a long time clappin' eyes on that blatherskite if he's got any of your coin in his jeans. How much you give him?"

"Four dollars," I lied.

"Not so bad! I give Pedro credit for bein' slicker than

that. He's a thief. He'd steal the gold out'n your teeth. Still, you got it in the neck, I'll say. Guess you're pretty leery now. I'll give you that pack-saddle for nothin', and I'll make that Mex greaser give me a drink of hooch the next time I collar him."

Jim Austin led the way across the sun-scorched street, giving us sage advice. "You kids 'll never get very far. I've be'n all over this country, the lining of my stomach turned inside out, my tongue and shirt-tail hangin' out. It's no cinch, take it from me. No mamma-darling stuff around here. If I were you, I'd beat it back where you come from. You couldn't hire me to hoof it around this dog-gone desert — least of all in July. This is a man's country, to put the fear o' God in your heart." He swept his arm around the horizon. "Look at it. Just a bad bit o' hell, nothin' much more — sand — cactus — mesquit — snakes — sunstroke. — Where you goin', anyhow?"

"On south."

He whistled. "Holy cripes, you guys 've got nerve, take it from me. Bad enough the other way, but on south ——" He gave a spit of tobacco juice, shook his head lugubriously, and walked away, his every muscle calling out: "Two fools! Two fools!"

III

I stood in the garage looking at Jim Austin's pack-saddles: eight pieces of wood — a pair of crossed uprights and four slats — and some straps.

"How do you fasten your load on to this?" I asked Red-head humbly.

"Tie it on. Or get five-gallon oil-can cases, drill holes in the ends for ropes and hook them over the ears of the saddle."

I finally got hold of two oil-cases, at the lunch-counter. Into

these we packed our groceries. When we had made our purchases in Bakersfield, we had requested the beans, rice, and so on to be put in strong bags. This had not been done; so we had to pack things in rather carefully.

I approached Jennie with the saddle. For the first time she showed interest in her surroundings, other than those having to do with belly needs. Fitting the saddle into place, I fastened the cinches, taking due care not to get them uncomfortably tight. Ralph on one side, I on the other, we lifted the boxes and hooked their rope handles over the prongs of the wooden saddle. Red-head glanced our way with a sardonic curl of his lips. The next problem was Jack. For him we had no saddle, but we planned to tie our blankets and lighter belongings to him somehow. We did — somehow. Everything was proving very simple. And we prided ourselves on our easy initiation into the mysteries of desert travel and the new possibilities of reaching O'Shaughnessy's cache of gold.

Triumphantly we ordered the two animals to move out the door. They did not stir. I struck Jennie — not too severely — with the end of a rope. Nothing happened. I called out in a gentlemanly sort of way. Nothing happened. I yelled louder.

Red-head glanced our way. "Get a good club and lambast 'em," he counselled. And, for all his customary lethargy, he leaped over with a yell and a string of oaths to give Jennie a terrific kick in the rear. She moved primly, not especially astonished at this outburst, toward the door. Five paces, and the saddle began to slip. A bag of beans fell off and burst. With a cry I made a frantic leap to keep the load from spilling further. "Grab the other side," I yelled to my brother. Together we lifted off our heavy oil-cases. Jackie's load of blankets was hanging under his belly, not on his back. I groaned. Our packing and loading had taken two hours. Our undoing had taken two seconds.

"You poor fishes," blubbered Red-head, the first mirth I had seen him display. "Here, I'll show you how to do it." He pushed the pack-saddle into place, braced his foot against Jennie's belly, and, pulling on the straps with all his might, he made veritable crevices in poor Jennie's anatomy. Jennie grunted slightly. "You see, they swell up when you cinch 'em, and you never can cinch 'em too tight to hurt 'em. Now, for this little pie-eyed mutt, I'll show you how to make a diamond hitch." —

Once more we lifted the oil-cases to their positions. Once more we started the burros forth, this time with clubs.

"Give 'em holy hell," advised Red-head. "Show 'em who's boss right from the go."

But five steps seemed Jennie's limit. Suddenly she plumped down on the ground and tried to roll. Beans and flour spilled over the ground. I beat her furiously. She rolled, waving her plump legs in the air. More beans and flour went by the board. My beating had no effect. "What a mess!" I groaned.

"Hey, hey," suddenly yelled Red-head. Once more he displayed, for the nonce, a surprising spurt of energy. Leaping forward, he seized Jennie's tail and twisted it violently into a sharp kink. She gave a little squeal and jumped up, shaking the load as vigorously as she could.

"Twist their tails. When they lie down, twist their tails," instructed Red-head.

"So I see," I replied, ruefully surveying the wrecked outfit. "It's just like cranking a Ford. I can do that."

IV

On the morrow we had the loads packed and were off soon after sun-up. Jennie was an astute monster. She saw hardship ahead; both she and Jack were determined not to leave

Wenden, where the harvest of tin-can labels and egg-shells was assured. We prodded them down the road and across the ragged, harsh country. But every few yards, as at a preconcerted signal, Jennie and Jack would go rushing off madly in opposite directions, trying to out-distance us and circle back to Wenden. Mad pursuit! Panting, sweating, zip-ping mad, we would head them off. Hands scratched and bleeding from the sharp mesquit and cactus thorns, we would rearrange their loads and beat them back in the direction we wished to go in. All day the two wily animals led us a merry dance. When they did not dash off madly through the sharp-thorned chaparral, they balked like rocks for hours on end, and no amount of swearing, prodding, or invocation could make them budge. When they did not run or balk, they brushed their packs violently against every limb and bush. Time after time we had to stop and reassemble their loads.

The climax came late that afternoon, when we ascended a rise near a range of low, reddish mountains. Jennie balked for the sixteen dozenth time with an absolute determination not to proceed another step that day.

We were standing in blue shadow; the sun had already dipped behind the mountains, but the valley below us was still shimmering. We were surprised to see the gleaming, sheet-iron roofs of Wenden. Very close they seemed. Surely one could walk there in an hour at most, and we had been fighting the burros all day. Worst of all, we could not afford to stop; we had to locate water.

But though I sharpened a manzanita stick and poked and prodded Jennie's black behind, she merely stiffened her legs more obstinately. I beat and jabbed her, yelling all the while. The blood streamed down her black hide, but she would not budge. Yet we could not camp here. It was absolutely impera-

tive to locate water. While I stayed with the burros, Ralph went on over the seamed ridge, to skirmish about.

Three-quarters of an hour later, he returned. "There's a mine over there and a funny cuss called Jim Nealey."

Once more I took up my club to belabour Jennie; but, as if she had understood Ralph's words, she started off briskly.

CHAPTER IV

JIM NEALEY: DESERT SAGE

I

WE prodded our two stubborn burros into the yard of the red house in the shadow of the barren hill whose steep rocky side gaped with a black mine shaft. A lanky miner, thin as a board, was standing on the low veranda, shading his eyes from the yellow glare of the setting sun. At sight of us his leathery face wrinkled; his lips curled up sardonically under his sun-bleached moustache; he burst into loud guffaws that shattered the desert stillness uncannily.

"How far are we from Wenden?" we asked.

"Seven miles"; and he guffawed again.

We were too tired and discouraged even to resent his humour. Seven miles! A whole day to come seven miles! At this rate it would take us a good five months to reach the Río Yaqui!

We lifted our loads from Jennie and Jack. Everything was in a wrecked jumble. Beans, rice, matches, had lost all race pride — were most promiscuously jumbled together. The constant jolting had broken the paper bags; the contents had sifted through to the bottoms of the boxes. Jim Nealey examined our things with an amused grin, polishing his yellow finger-nails in his sparse gray hair, just back of his ear — a sadistic gesture, giving him the appearance of a crow glowering over a cadaver. "Them burros! Them burros!" he ejaculated. "They've been scavenging around Wenden ever since I c'n remember."

We related our difficulties to him.

"Town burros 're always canny," he summarized. "They're smarter'n cross-eyed, horn-specked, hump-backed college profs. Even so, they ain't worth a whoop in the hot place when it comes to use. They're lazy, soft, slow, obstreperous, and just no account noways — like guys that hang around pool-rooms. You'd do better to pack your stuff on your own backs."

We sat down limply on the edge of the porch.

"Well, better wash up, an' I'll cook up a snack to eat. But them burros! Holy smoke! Why, to tag along with them critters is jest naturally a crime agin' natur'. A man in this here desert has to hit the high spots when he's atravellin'. He has to keep shufflin' along all-fired fast, or he's a goner, an' that's all there be to it. You kids can't go loiterin' around with worthless animals like them two birds, like as if you was on a silk-parasol parade."

He thrust a tin dipper into a huge red *olla*, suspended from the roof, took a big gulp, and squirted the rest over a scraggly Australia pea-vine winding up one of the posts.

II

Supper consisted of beans, hard biscuits, and black coffee, but though we had not stopped to cook any noonday meal, the day's heat and our weariness had killed all desire for food. We ate listlessly — no appetite. Jim Nealey noticed the way we pecked at the food.

"You'd better learn to eat good victuals in this here desert when you can get 'em. A man needs to be prepared. You can't jest fool around. You've gotta cook at the water-holes and jump to the next water-hole quick as God 'll let you; you gotta keep humpin' as though a bulldog were hangin' to your pants; you gotta keep shufflin' your feet as though you had

some place to go, with the devil hisself hot-foot after you with a red-hot prong — like as not you won't find no water noway. You need good animals, good feet, an' plenty of get-up and ginger. Pep! Pep's what you need. You can't lie around, or belly-ache, or anything else, 'cause hereabouts sometimes it bumps up close to 130, an' that's just about hot enough to singe the fuzz on a bald man's pate. Mister Satan hisself can't do much better. Which way you goin' from here?"

"South."

He whistled, a long, sibilant exhalation through yellow, broken teeth. "Say, you kids 're committin' suicide, plain, unadulterated suicide. South o' here is the Harqua Hala desert, and it's a long, long road to the next cool place, but a short, short road to a still hotter place. Down in them sands the jack rabbits has to turn up their tootsie-wootsies and wave 'em in the air to cool 'em off. An' the coyotes carry canteens o' water, an' they lope like hell. It's a country to put the fear o' God in a man's heart. It makes you cuss soft-like when you see it stretching away seductive-like to the end o' nowhere. The sand 'll scorch the soles off your shoes, and if you touch a rock, it'll burn your fingers to the bone. Eggs cook by 'emselves. No kiddin'! An' there's only one spot where you c'n git water — Dead Man's Well, an' sometimes that's dry, dry as a bone."

He tilted his stool back against the veranda wall. His pipe glowed in the dark. To the right rose the black outline of the hill where our host had sunk his mining-shaft. The buildings and machinery were queer, distorted masses. Below us stretched the desolate sands of the McMullen Valley, framed in to our view by two poplar-trees. A tall Jordan palm stuck up its bunglesome arms, silhouetted against the star-studded sky like a clumsy trident.

"Dead Man's Well," he repeated in a low voice.

“ And why is it called that? ”

“ A good pair o’ years back, three men dyin’ o’ thirst made this well, but it was a gol-durn dry season, an’ the well hadn’t nary a drop o’ water. I reckon the bones o’ them three ginks are still a-lyin’ right at the edge o’ that thar hole. An ol’ friend o’ mine, Tim Scroggins, breezed through that country a good spell back. He went prospectin’ out o’ Agua Caliente. He got lost in the Eagle Tail range an’ wandered about for a week without even shoe-leather to chew on. He’d gone without water three days when he struck a landmark he knowed an’ made Dead Man’s Well, his tongue hangin’ out an’ his lips swelled up like two purple hams. That thar water saved him, but he was too gol-durn weak to go on. He wuz alyin’ thar in a bit o’ shade from a chamiso plant when a big bird lit on a branch, crack over the well. Tim had one lousy cartridge left in his gun, an’ that thar bird meant life’s sweet tune to him. He aimed. Three times he started to pull the trigger, but his hand shook, an’ his eyesight blurred. He sez to me afterwards that it seemed like a month o’ Sundays that he wuz alyin’ thar. He wuz afraid that bird’d fly away an’ yit he couldn’t waste no shot. Think o’ him alyin’ thar with the sun hammerin’ all about, three days o’ turrible walkin’ afore he could get any more food, lyin’ thar, mind you, his hand ashakin’ on that thar trigger an’ his eyesight blurred, his head a bustin’ and his mind half *loco*. Them be the moments that make a guy know jest about what death tastes like, I c’n tell you. Well, he wuz jest takin’ aim ag’in when the bird lifted its wings an’ stretched. Tim, he thought it wuz a goin’ to fly away then and thar, an’ he yanked the trigger. He smashed one of the wings all right, an’ the bird, it flopped on the ground. Tim, he staggered after the blame thing, but he was too gol-durn weak; he couldn’t get his two paws on it. It’d always flop jest out’n his reach. Here he wuz, dead gone, his stomach burnin’ up with the ache o’ hunger, the hot sun

hammerin' him all the time, reelin' round in the sands after this bird what meant the sweet song o' life to him, an' findin' it always jest out'n his reach.

"Now, that's why I'm tellin' you two to take a think. Why don't you camp here on the mine, make this your stampin' grounds, an' you c'n take trips out from here? You're jest as likely to stumble on something round here as anywhere else, leastwise that's my opinion. You'll have water an' a strap to hang to, an' if you get lost, you'll have somebody that knows it an' can go beatin' round for you. You c'n stick on here long as you've a mind to."

"No, we're going on, somehow or other." The cache of gold on the Río Yaqui was too strong a magnet.

He shook his head and scratched behind his ear. "You know what you're up ag'in. Why, last year, right off the main road to Hassayampa, they picked up a fellow. He'd gone plum *loco*, pulled off his clothes. He died stark naked, with his lips glued to his dry canteen, an' you could see with half a squint that he was an old-timer, at that."

"But what happened to Tim and his bird?"

"Well, thar he wuz, reelin' round in the sand after that gol-durn wounded bird, that meant life's sweet tune to him, but what kept floppin' jest outa reach. It plumped into a little hollow, an' Tim, he give a last lunge an' fell smack on top it. He sez to me the last thing he heard afore he fainted dead away wuz the little squawk o' that thar bird as he landed on top it. When Tim come to, the sun wuz a-goin' down. He fig'ed he'd been lyin' thar plum' dead to the world goin' on three hours. The bird wuz still underneath him — dead, yes siree, dead, dead as a door-nail. Tim, he crawled around an' made a fire. He said that gol-durn bird wuz the best honest-to-God food he'd ever stuck in his mouth. It saved his life, you see."

III

Jim Nealey pulled at his pipe. We stared at the valley under the moonlight. Near the Jordan palm our burros munched on the dead grass. Occasionally Jennie wheezed with a big sigh. The loneliness sharpened all our senses.

"They say you can cut off the spines from some of the cacti and suck the pulp to get water," remarked Ralph.

"The Indians hereabouts do that, but, then, they knows the desert better 'n a dog knows his fleas, an' they knows how and jest what cactus to tackle. It's blame little water you greenhorns 'll get that way. I tell you two kids this sun sucks the juice right out'n a man's guts; an' a little water don't go gol-durn far. You drink it up afore you can say "Jack Robinson." An' even when death's right down the straightaway, an' you thinks as how you'll go kind o' easy on your water, conservin' it like, well, you don't. You jest keep drinkin' an' drinkin' an' drinkin' till there ain't nary a drop left. Bein' hungry a man can stand, but wantin' water when the top o' the thermometer's blowed off is somethin' that turns a man's guts inside out an' rips him to pieces afore he knows what's happenin'. Your tongue swells up an' you can't keep your mouth noways closed. Pretty soon your lips are purple an' swollen half the size o' your phiz, an' then you begins rippin' your clothes right off'n yourself. That's jest about the sweet, sweet swan sing. Good-bye, *mammacita!* You couldn't get me hikin' across this here country, not on your bleary old tintype. I done it once or twice, but never ag'in, take it from me." Nealey tamped his pipe and went on in his drawling, lazy voice.

"As soon as I tickle some sucker into buyin' this here hole in the ground" — he waved his arm toward the dark mine-shaft — "an' let me give you a tip, it's a gol-durn good buy

at that — why, Little Willie, Yours Truly, Jim Nealey of Maricopa County, Arizona, U. S. A., 's goin' to make tracks out o' this here des'late country as fast as his footies 'll carry him. I'm a bach'lor. Never got hooked up with no skirt, leastwise not fer long. But if I ever git a little wad, you can bet your sweet life I'm goin' to hunt me up a real passionate widow with a little flesh on her bones an' settle down an' let her make me happy-like. I've been a bum too gol-durn long."

He refilled his pipe. "I've got a blame good thing here — this mine — it ain't far from the railroad an' it's got good payin' ore. Only you have to sink shafts an' blast fer it. I've got a little machinery, a few chutes, an' such things, but I hain't got enough cap'tal to make the durn thing a real go. You get what I mean, don't you? I need a good honest pardner with a little dough to invest. But I'd rather sell out, between you an' me, an' spend a few years in comfort, sittin' round on hotel piazzas an' that sort o' thing. I guess you get what I'm drivin' at. Even now the place pays me a few thousand a year, an' at that I c'n only work it in the rainy season, when thar's water for sluicin'. Some time I'll sink a well, one of these artesian wells. I ain't done so bad at that, but I wanta sell. The last three years I've been beatin' it down to Frisco and Los to hunt up a buyer."

"How long have you had the mine?"

"Going on fifteen year now."

"Doesn't anybody bother it when you're away?"

"Used to be a few low-down Mex nosin' round, but they're leery as fleas on a policeman. Oncet they broke into the house an' cleaned out everything, left it empty as a coyote's belly. But I fixed 'em." He laughed. "I fixed 'em. Come pretty close to givin' one of 'em a coffin for a kimono. They think the place is ha'nted now. I've got some powerful storage bats on the place, an' I rigged up connections so that anyone tryin' to force the front door 'd get a hell of a shock,

that'd tie him up in a knot. An' oncet I fixed up a little charge o' giant powder that knocked one of 'em four ways to Sunday. You could see a blood trail goin' off into the sands, but the fellow that got hurt was wise enough to lie low an' make no bones 'bout what 'd happened. I'd put the sheriff wise aforehand as to jest what I intentioned doin', so that thar interpolator 'd've gotten his twicet over. Well, that little stunt sure turned the trick. There's not a Mex between here an' Tucson that don't know 'bout the ha'nted mine near Wenden. Only now I've a devil of a time gettin' someone to work for me, even when I'm Johnny on the spot. This year not a ding-busted soul 'd come within a mile o' the place, an' I've had to do everything all by my lonesome. If I'd 've had a couple o' Mex workin' for me at a couple o' bucks a day, I'd 've turned out three times as much. Still, it don't make no never-minds, and I ain't kickin'."

He knocked his pipe against the rung of his stool, stood up, and stretched with a gruesome yawn.

"To-morrow I'll show you two kids how to fix up your grub so you won't lose it all. You'd better tie up them burros to-night, or they'll go sneakin' off to Wenden again — though durn if you wouldn't be better off. I've a saddle for the little fellow too."

CHAPTER V

DEAD MAN'S WELL

I

THE stars had already grown tarnished in the light of the false dawn. We swung over a high shoulder of feldspar and shale. A rim of gold edged the purple eastern summits. A thousand shadows, depressions, and sun-touched hills lay before us. Though we had left the desert floor, the hills were still harsh and bare. But we soon looked down into a little ravine thick with underbrush. A bevy of quail whirled, soft and low, with inimitable grace, along the crenelated slope. The leaves of the ironwood-trees and the ocotillos shone with dew; the shadows were long, cool, and fresh; the air still breathed its early fragrance.

Jennie, too, felt the dawn's exhilaration. She stepped along quite lively, only occasionally rubbing her load against the bushes, with stealthy backward glances to see whether we had noticed. But we accompanied every attempt with plenty of good beating and cussing. Finally she gave up these tactics entirely, though whenever we came to a good stretch of down grade, she darted off enthusiastically with as many jumps and jolts as she could, blundering through the chamiso most recklessly. But the cinches were tight, the loads well packed. We swung along gaily to the rhythmical rub-rub-rub of the saddle and blanket and the crunch of hoofs on the crust of the gravel.

Toward noon, well over the Harqua Hala Mountains, when we were dipping down toward a new desert mesa, the

day ferociously hot, Jennie began to limp. I examined her foot, but discovered nothing the matter. Yet her limping grew steadily worse. Had her conduct the whole day not been so exemplary, I should have suspected a ruse. Several times, though, she stumbled and nearly fell. Every step gave her excruciating pain. I was tempted to make camp; but the day was but half done, the urge of the road was still in us, and at all cost we had to reach water; so I kept encouraging her. We were getting on rather slowly, quite conscious of our cruelty, when — may all hypocrites take this to heart — she sped toward a particularly luscious tuft of dried grass. Not a sign of a limp! She had forgotten her lameness completely. Her gustatory desires had betrayed her.

"You old fraud," I muttered, half amused. I re-examined her hoof — no soreness there. We walloped her with right goodwill to let her know we were wise to her trick. She went on sullenly, limping slightly. Indeed her limp continued for fully half an hour — such is the strength of even burro pride — but, as each limp brought her a sound blow, her walk improved speedily. Soon her lameness was quite forgotten. From then on, though unutterably lazy, Jennie became a model of docility — quite faithful to the best traditions of her sex.

At last we dropped into another rolling valley, somewhat wooded: false peppers, ash, scrub-oak, cottonwoods, several osiers. Here, about two o'clock, we camped for our noonday meal. We had eaten and were dozing in the shade when we were aroused by a small herd of ponies, horses, burros, and mules, which had come quite close to us, attracted by Jennie and Jack. My attention was particularly drawn to a stalwart young male burro. Calling to Ralph, I snatched up a rope, which I knotted into a lariat as I ran. We tried to isolate the jack from the herd, but this proved a hot and difficult task. The herd, only half wild, did not run far at our approach,

but all the animals clung closely together. After several charges and strategic manœuvres, we succeeded in breaking it up into three droves; but how to separate out the jack was the problem, for he stuck close to a young mule and two other burros. The four of them wheeled and dodged for fully an hour with exquisite cleverness. But finally my brother descended on them from one side, I from the other. The four animals wheeled madly; our jack miscalculated and was forced all alone on one side of a row of dense *choya blanca* cactus. He ran in under a castor-bean tree and stood there quietly, as though he had never been chased. He gave a few jerks away from the noose, but over his head it went. He was even handsomer than our wild-chase glimpses had led us to suppose; about three years old, a foot higher than Jennie, almost three times the size of little Jack, strong and sturdy as a young mule, and without a blemish or brand or saddle mark on him. A true maverick! We dubbed him Prince and transferred Jennie's and part of Jack's load to him. Jennie we would ride. Prince at first objected strenuously to this arrangement. He would stop, start, or run madly toward the brush. But we blocked his every attempt, flailing his sides with a vim learned from our previous experiences. Nor did Jennie fancy being ridden. She was mildly amazed at this startling change of duty. Finally she made a big to-do, plucking up enough recalcitrant energy to buck. Though her bucking was no great thing, her barrel-like belly was plump and sleek; I couldn't grip her with my heels. Riding became a tragi-comedy of slipping off, beating her, and clambering on again. But after a while both she and Prince settled down to a steady gait; and by sundown, when we reached an artesian well, Prince had become an admirable lead animal, and Jennie went along as sedately as though we were on a Canterbury pilgrimage. Jack, unfortunately, was finding it increasingly difficult to keep up, and several times we had to retrace

our steps and give him a good spanking, yelling "On to the Río Yaqui!" to revive his spirits.

II

The next day we were up before the morning star began to glow in the pale violet-indigo sky. With no guide except our small pocket compass we swung across country. The high, clear notes of small birds hopping about in the cottonwood-trees greeted us cheerfully. Bevvies of quail whirred, soft and low, out of the thick bushes. Our hearts sang with the awakening day, with the clump, clump, clump of the burros' dainty hoofs, with the rhythmical rubbing of the packs, the fresh scent of sage-brush and mint, and the sudden braying of the animals.

The day brightened. The mountains turned from purple to chocolate, to vermilion. The sun leaped up in all his excessive vigour. The air now turned stale and acrid; the alkaline dust ate into our nostrils; the sweat streamed into our eyes. The swinging gait of our early morning start slackened to a ruthless, dull plodding. In the clear light of the blazing sun everything was clear, sharply outlined; every bush revealed its stiff ribs; the blue shadows were thin and pale; the mountains stood out stark and red and harsh, eaten into by the long landslides. Heat-waves glimmered like a distant sea, and the sinister sun wheeled overhead in ruthless pursuit. The excessive light blinded us; sharp pains shot along the back of my skull.

The valley widened out into a wide mesa, sparsely sprinkled with chaparral. The way became sandier and the arid character of the country more marked, the distance between the plants greater. Now each plant seemed methodically set out by hand in an enormous nursery, so regular were the spacings and so high was the sand hummocked about the

roots. The vegetation was very scraggly, but some of the saguaros, or giant cactuses, rose over fifty feet in height, poking up like the splintered Corinthian columns of a vanished city.

Here and there the main trunks of these saguaros, which are marked with deep, longitudinal flukes, protected by whitish spines, had been wounded by woodpeckers. Around the large cavities thus formed had grown a hard, brown tissue. We struck one of the trunks with a club, and a small gray owl tumbled out and sat blinking on the edge. When the saguaro dies, it becomes the home of bees or bats. As the moisture evaporates, the ribs stand out — a hard, wooden skeleton, from which the green, juicy flesh has disappeared. These ribs, we came to learn, provide the Indians with light, strong, and elastic building-material. The wooden wall that grows around the holes made by the woodpeckers is cut out to be used for water-bottles. The saguaro is the all-round friend of the Indians. The juice of the yellow fruit he converts into wine; the black seeds he grinds into an edible paste on his stone metate.

Burros, though good burden-carriers, are no real travellers, incapable of covering as much ground as a man. Under a ferociously devastating sun twelve to sixteen miles a day is a burro's maximum, and this only by taking a siesta of three or four hours during the heat of midday and travelling after dark. Three days it took us to reach Dead Man's Well. The last half day we did without water. Our mouths and lips were drier than parchment, throats choking from heat and dust, entrails burning — a ghoulish torture. We reeled on, scarcely able to lift our feet, too weary even to belabour the burros, dragging our way in the sand, stumbling over the boulders, hour after hour of blinding monotony, on and on, ready to drop in our tracks, but lashed by fear and thirst, determined to reach Dead Man's Well. We came at sundown into a



DESERT CACTUS



THE MESA

criss-crossing of low, jejune, igneous hills, struck a faint track, and followed down an arroyo to a shallow basin of natural red stone, surrounded by a few abject shrubs and partly filled with murky rain-water, into which the alkaline dust had sifted for years on end. Such was the well that had saved Tim Scroggin's life; ours too, perhaps.

Ahead of us — three, perhaps four days to reach Agua Caliente and water again! We shrank from the ordeal. We recalled all of Jim Nealey's warnings, and our difficulties in reaching Dead Man's Well filled us with fear.

Turn back? No, we couldn't turn back. Yet that last, waterless half day had taught us, if not a little wisdom, at least a little caution. We determined to loop the mountains by turning west and north to reach the road running from Harcouver to Arlington or Hassayampa. This meant an extra week of travel.

Our caution was probably justified, for the terrible heat kept up unabated. But on the road we met an auto party and a teamster who replenished our water-supply. Five days later we reached Arlington, camping just before sundown in a welcome grove of trees near the river that cuts through here.

The air was very humid and most oppressive. A wild thunder-storm was brewing. Black clouds scurried weirdly over the sky; the lightning glittered fitfully on the mountain peaks. The possibility of a storm had not until now occurred to us. We bought a piece of canvas at the general store to protect our goods. Fortunately, however, only a few large drops of rain fell, though that night the mosquitoes were pestiferous and stung us madly, though we bundled ourselves up suffocatingly.

The following day we left the river, short-cutting over the hills to Gila Bend. Towards evening we came into a rolling, sandy country, circled by lofty, crag-like peaks on all sides. Here, towards twilight, we were attacked by another storm.

Clouds oozed up from the horizon on the swift wings of the unexpected wind — a long, phantom rustle over the acrid, alkaline slopes. An ominous calm! Not a leaf stirred. Then a startling roar, as the storm burst upon us. The hammering wind, gathering itself into one great avalanche of thunder, swooped down in a full gale. Enormous swirls of brackish dust whipped us in the face and whirled up into solid clouds against the muggy sky. The earth plunged into impenetrable darkness save when the vicious lightning lit up the lurid peaks — vast, molten abrasions in the sky, starting at the zenith, flashing down on peak after peak in a spatter of crimson and golden glory. The thunder yelled, hammered, volleyed in continuous cannonading, rolling near and far in a thousand smashing echoes, that slowly died away into moments of unearthly stillness. At other times the thunder cracked and banged directly over our heads, drowning out our shouts to each other. Our world rocked and splintered with light and sound, long reverberations that swept from pocket to pocket, cloud to cloud, peak to peak, with a dying, despairing passion — as though some super-Stravinsky were chastising the universe with epic, clashing chords. Yet for all of this vast stagecraft, the drama sputtered out. Only a few drops fell. Gradually the clouds thinned. The setting sun peeked through — a saffron, uncanny glow suffused the near-by mountains and the wide reach of sands. The sun sank lower, engulfing us in a hundred gorgeous, extravagant colours — violet-reds and yellows and purples burning over cloud and mountain height — colours shot through with the lightning which still flashed and sparkled in vertiginous violence down upon a dozen surrounding peaks; the wind and thunder still bellowed and stamped and trumpeted from afar; but slowly, portentously, the night laid its majestic, cool hand upon the fevered earth, and the great peace was with us again.

III

Early the following day we camped under the cottonwoods on the sands of the Gila River and prepared to take stock of ourselves, for it had been nearly two weeks since we left Wenden. We washed our clothes, took a swim, and that night decided to cook a good meal, for we had been living on a saw-dust diet, jumping from water-supply to water-supply, cooking a bit at night, munching on dried fruit at noon. Our mouths watered for an especially good feed — flapjacks, canned peas, stewed prunes, tea.

The cooking cans were on the fire; the pancakes were keeping warm in the spider; we were at peace with ourselves and our world when the now customary evening storm blew up. As before, this was preceded by a breathless calm; even the tremulous leaves of the cottonwood-trees did not stir; all animal life ceased its routine movements and sounds, a hush enveloped the universe — only the soft ripple of the river. Then the wind! It leapt upon us; the trees bent double; the sand rasped our faces. The air grew thick and yellow with the swirling dust, that clogged our very breathing. A more violent swoop of wind than usual, and the pan of stewed prunes came flying against the tree-trunk. Hastily we grabbed the peas and flapjacks, hugging the hot pans to us, disregarding of the soot-smeared bottoms, and turned our backs to the lashing storm like driven sheep.

As before, no rain fell, but the alkaline sand continued to sift into our mouths, our ears, our noses; it smarted in our eyes — huge tears streamed down our grimy cheeks. At last the wind abated; the thunder gradually retreated; and a tense, dead peace fell over the world.

We tried to eat our peas and flapjacks, now stone-cold. But our teeth crunched on grit. In bitter disgust we flung the food

to the burros, quarrelled violently, and spread our blankets on opposite sides of a thicket.

The sand, soft, silt-like, bunched into hummocks, not in the hollows of the body, but at the hips, shoulder-blades, head. I felt myself perforated by knobs. Every movement accentuated our discomfort, and I spent a wakeful, irritable night, wondering whether a cache of gold on the Río Yaqui was really worth the getting.

CHAPTER VI

LOST PRINCE

I

THE next morning found us tired and fretful. The moment the sun poked above the horizon, the day became stagnant; our bodies ran with sweat.

At five-thirty in the morning we were already quite without pep, and dragged about, assembling our things, like feeble old men.

Prince was nowhere to be seen. Further down the river was a thicket of tules, bamboo, and vines, rising higher than a man's head. We beat through the undergrowth in all directions. Not a sign of Prince! At first our hunt was random and sporadic. But as he could not be found, we made it systematic. We hunted carefully though nearly an acre and a half of dense river-growth. No Prince! I scaled a hill on the bank. About a quarter of a mile away, in a hollow, grew some scrub-oaks. I dog-trotted over. There, carefully concealed in a circle of shrubs, stood Prince, munching leaves. He started guiltily at sight of me.

For some days previous to this he had been growing steadily more peevish. His feet were sore, and he was tired of forced travelling. From this time on he hid persistently and adroitly every night, and, though we hobbled him, he would travel long distances through the chaparral to get away. He had a keen nose for outlandish hiding-places, a chameleon's sense of camouflage. A white sand-bank, or a huge gray

boulder, would make his hide almost invisible. Some days we wasted many precious, cool morning hours in angry search and were forced to set out long after sun-up. It finally came to the point where we had to tie Prince up securely each night. This meant sitting up several hours after making camp and eating, to give him a chance to browse. One evening, after he had been tied, when the gnats were particularly vicious, he broke tether and went dashing off like a cyclone, determined to get away from us once and for all. We caught him after a hard chase and tied him up more securely. But apparently the insects drove him frantic, for he broke away again and tore down the hill-side. Wildly we chased after him. But it took us a good three miles of hard running to head him off. At the end of a toilsome day's hike, to chase a crazed burro through the sage-brush for miles on the dead run—well, our good humor evaporated along with our chastity of speech. My brother and I snapped at each other like bantam cocks, and Prince paid the price.

South of the Gila Bend, in the Papago Indian settlement, we arrived at the *Ranchería Pelón*, a wide corral flanked with adobe houses. These houses were mud-roofed and their walls were made with wattle-woven sticks of the saguaro cactus, or the paloverde, plastered with straw-mixed mud. We stopped for water and went on to a small wash, east of the town of Gila Bend. There, in a hollow of rock, we discovered a small pool of water, left over from a heavy thunder-storm of the previous evening.

We camped here under the trees, and, while I cooked beans, my brother set out on the five miles to Gila Bend to get several oil-cans for carrying water for the burros on the long, desolate stretch south. The fire under the beans was going merrily; so I sat down on the bank to mend my khaki trousers. Then I looked at our map of Arizona and Sonora

to plan our route. But the heat eddied noxiously. I felt listless, drowsy. The dragon-flies and gnats buzzed in my ears. I stuck the map into my hip pocket and dozed off.

II

An unpleasant dream of being smothered by an avalanche awoke me violently. Two Indians, riding two burros and leading a third — a large, gray jack — had plunged down into the wash and were now dashing up the opposite bank. They lashed their animals and scurried off across the desert at a great rate.

Again I drowsed. About two o'clock I reawoke and looked around for the burros. Jennie and Jack were sleeping; Jack with his nostrils against his mother's side, head drooping. The gnats annoyed him mercilessly. He flicked his ears and tried to dig himself into his mother's flank. But Prince was nowhere to be found.

Again and again I beat through the chaparral on all sides. No Prince! He had vanished! The earth had swallowed him up! For the tenth time I beat hurriedly through the chaparral. Neither hide nor hair of him did I find. But I ran upon several fresh burro tracks that I took to be his. One set joined the tracks of the Indians who had rustled across the wash. By George! Their extra burro must have been Prince!

I dashed up the opposite bank and stared across the flat, blazing desolation. They were nowhere in sight. I boiled with anger at the very way they had dashed right past me. On a dead run I set off bareheaded across the desert, following the tracks of the three burros. Growing ever more furious, I raced along the trail they had left. The day before, on the Gila River, the thermometer had touched 118°. To-day was even hotter. But I went tearing through the sand under the blazing midday sun, which struck ruthlessly down upon my

unprotected head. The sand slipped from under my feet. My throat grew dry and parched; my tongue hung out; my eyeballs ached. My breath came in gasps, and my heart hammered. But I was more angry and determined than ever. Dazedly I reeled on, the sweat streaming down my face. An hour of this; then the tracks patterned out into a crazy criss-crossing, leading in every direction. Which way had the Indians gone?

A single burro track led definitely off toward the east, a double one south-west. Evidently the thieves had parted company. Or had they met a third companion, who had taken the extra burro? There was no time to waste; so I crunched along on the double track.

At every step I grew dizzier. But I kept on. I was determined to run the thing down, cost what it might. Presently the two tracks abruptly curved toward the *Ranchería Pelón*, but among the stones of a little wash they dwindled away.

I ran around like a setter, trying to pick them up again. Not a trace of them! Three times I made wide, complete circles around the spot. Not a sign of fresh tracks! Had my chase been for nothing? I stared about me helplessly. Three miles away on the shimmering sands lay the *Ranchería*, a brown wart on the white sands. Had the thieves gone there? Most likely. I set out again on a dead run.

Panting, almost dead, my eyes blinded, I staggered through the corral gate and sank under a *ramada* of branches and palm leaves. My breath still came in short gasps. I was nauseated. I felt a sickness, a revolting weariness in every part of me. An old Indian crone, face wrinkled as elephant's hide, gazed at me curiously.

Her face danced in my sight, blurred, grew indistinguishable. Her dirty blouse, dust-dragging skirts, bare feet, shiny, black, coarse hair, faded away until she became a wavering phantom. She disappeared through a doorway. The motion

of her body seemed nervously disconnected, like scenes in a slow-up film. I lost consciousness.

The Indian woman was holding a red, terra-cotta cup to my lips. I seized it in my two shaking hands and swallowed the contents at a gulp. Paying no attention to my "*gracias*," she again disappeared, but came out once more, this time with a large bowl, filled to the brim. I gulped this down also. A flicker of a smile passed over her grim, aged features.

Gradually my dizziness passed. My gaze strayed over to the animals drowsing in the corral. Two large white jacks, necks crossed, stood near a stone well. But I couldn't scare up enough energy to go over and look at them. I could only lie there, staring dizzily,

But at last I struggled to my feet, legs shaky, body bent over, arms dangling, seeming to lack all muscular control. Unsteadily, very unsteadily, I left the shade of the *ramada* and zigzagged over to the drowsing animals.

One of them was Prince! No doubt about it! Not the least in the world! Once more I recalled those two Indians rushing past me, and gasped to think of their brazenness!

But what was I to do now? Here I was in a settlement of perhaps fifty Indians, right in their communal corral. My animal — no doubt of it — yet not a marking on it to prove it to be mine. To be sure I too had rounded it up in the hills; still I could scarcely be blamed for considering myself the rightful owner. But what was to be done now? Should I seek out someone in authority and demand Prince? I did not even have a rope to put around his neck. The more I thought of the situation, the angrier I got; the angrier I got, the less reasonable my schemes became. At last I seized the short rope from the companion burro and boldly tied it around Prince's neck.

Had anyone observed me? I looked around me nervously.

The old crone who had given me the water was still standing under the *ramada*, watching me curiously. Some naked children were digging in a patch of shade. Through the open doorways of several of the *jacales* I saw other figures. What would they do to me if I walked off with the burro? Would anybody try to stop me? Would I be attacked?

But, come what might, I was determined to take Prince. He had become an absolute necessity for our gold-hunting expedition. "Come along," I commanded, jerking the rope. For once Prince forgot to be obstinate and followed me as dutifully as Mary's little lamb. My knees were still shaky. Taking Prince from under the noses of the entire tribe made them more shaky. But I kept on, squelching an almost uncontrollable desire to look back. Rope in hand, I marched straight toward the unbarred exit from the corral.

The old crone grew excited and ran over to a neighbouring *jacal*. I tried to walk on unconcernedly, but quickened my pace. A tall Indian in a red blanket ducked out from the low doorway and hurried toward me. I watched him out of the tail of my eye, but kept right ahead. He stepped squarely in front of me, uttering harsh Indian sounds. I tried to pass him. A baleful light glinted in his beady, black eyes. He spoke to me in Spanish, so rapidly and gutturally that I could not understand a word. Again I tried to pass him.

Thoroughly angered, he stepped sideways, keeping between me and the gate and talking volubly. Several more Indians came running up. One was a young mestizo, a town-look to him, for he wore shoes and a cocky sombrero. Three girls joined us. In the twinkling of an eye, a surprised truculent group had surrounded me. They all kept gabbling and eyeing me curiously.

They jabbered some more. Then the mestizo said in broken English: "Burro, him belong to Tiku." He tapped the tall red-blanketed Indian on the shoulder.

I clung tightly to my rope. "This is my burro. His name is Prince; and I'm taking him with me." Again I moved to go on.

But the tall Indian stuck himself menacingly in front of me, and the mestizo said leeringly: "No let you take 'm. We no let you. We many. You all alone. Him not your burro."

I was surrounded all right, Gila Bend a good five miles away. They could murder me here. Who would be the wiser? Even my brother did not know where I was. For the present, at least, the game was up.

"Then keep the burro," I flung at them. "But as sure as I'm alive, I'll come back here with the sheriff and you'll go to jail, the whole crew of you."

"Him not your burro. We no go to jail." The mestizo leered at me, cocking back his hat still further.

I ignored him. Chagrined beyond words, I tossed away the end of my rope and turned away. The mestizo jeered after me. "You think you much smart. *Adiós!*"

Not until I had turned out of the corral did I look back. The mestizo was still sneering at me. But the others watched me go with mild amazement. The aged crone was still standing there like a withered stump, clutching her terra-cotta bowl to her dirty blouse.

III

I set my face to the dim line of trees that marked the wash where we were camping. In all I had covered about eight miles, most of it on the dead run beneath the murderous desert sun. To get back to camp I had over four miles to go. But no, not four miles, three times four miles, a thousand miles! Our camp was at the other end of the world, a universe away! Not even my choking rage could make me hurry now. I dragged along, quivering with my hot feelings

of injustice, vowing over and over again I'd sick the sheriff down on those blackguard Indians and make them pay the piper. At every painful step in the burning sand I grew less amiable and more sullen.

When I finally reached the wash near camp, the sun had already wheeled low in the sky, filling the world, to my tired eyes, with a quivering, grayish-yellow unreality. At a turn I was back where hours before I had been peacefully mending and sleeping.

From the brush I could see my brother. His back was toward me. He was viciously throwing stones at some object invisible to me and yelling in angry tones. I stepped forward.

Of all the weird miracles! Prince! My brother was throwing stones at Prince! I rubbed my aching eyes. Prince! No doubt about it! For who would be so rash as to credit a burro with a ghost? And Prince — Prince was nosing in the bean-can that stood in the now extinguished fire. Yelling louder than ever my brother was upon him. With a wild, ferocious kick he drove Prince off the beans. Then Ralph spied me; the wild look in his eyes turned to anger.

"You goddam idiot!" he blared. "Why in Sam Patch do you let that fool burro eat the beans? Here I go hiking around in the sun to Gila Bend and back again, lugging these cursed oil-cans, and you sit like a praying Buddha and let the burro eat up the beans. You ought to know by this time you have to keep an eye on these birds."

I stared at my brother, too tired and amazed to answer. He was obviously angry. I stared at Prince. Prince was not angry, in spite of my brother's kick. I mentally surveyed myself. If anybody had a right to be angry, it was certainly myself. But I was not angry. I was mystified. And it struck me as monstrously funny that Ralph should be so enraged. Why had *he* a right to be so upset?

My silence infuriated him still more. "You batty nut! You perambulating imbecile, you — you ——" He groped for words. "A burro's a wizard of intelligence alongside of you. Why ——"

My feelings of self-pity took charge of me. I turned on him sarcastically. "You walked to town did you? There and back? You poor little infant! Tired, eh? Well, if you'd like to know it, I've covered twelve miles — twelve honest-to-God miles on the dead run, all since two o'clock this afternoon, and I didn't come here to be called names. If you don't like what I do, you can just light out somewhere else. Nobody's telling you to stick around here with me."

My counter anger dumbfounded him. He stared at me. And I stared at Prince, the apparently winged Prince — Pegasus reduced to bathos. Prince ogled his interrupted repast — the spilled beans. He had backed off a little way and was visibly contemplating another sortie, evidently having decided a second swipe at the beans would repay the cost of the inevitable drubbing that would follow. My brother's ire quickened again. "But the beans — why ——"

I continued to look at the ubiquitous Prince. "This is positively uncanny. I've been hot on his trail for nearly four hours, tearing along, without even a hat on my head." My voice cracked in my parched throat. I seized one of our canteens, hanging from a bough, and drank till my face swelled red. Again I went over to look at the beans. I pushed the smouldering embers together with my foot.

"What's the use of bothering with those beans?" snapped Ralph. "They're done for."

"There's a few here."

"A nice big meal!" he sneered. "If you like burro's leavings, you're darn welcome. I thought we'd have a good feed to-night, just for a change. But now — well there's no use cooking beans again; it's too late. When we do get a

chance to eat something besides dried fruit, you let a measly burro —— ”

Hurt dignity choked back my reply. I continued to bend over the fire, stirring up the few remaining beans. Suddenly a tug at my back pocket! I clapped my hand to the spot. Our map! Our precious map! I whirled around. Prince had seized it in his teeth and danced off.

I grabbed for it. He swung away his head, and I missed it. In a moment it would be gone down his throat, past recovery. Another grab! I tore it from his teeth.

He had bitten off one corner. I opened it out to see the damage. Durango, Mexico, was missing, gone as neatly as if it had been clipped out with scissors.

I stared at Prince furiously. He stood there, an image of mock dejection. “ Well,” I said inanely, “ Durango’s gone. Thank goodness we’ll never go that way.”

“ But the beans —— ” persisted Ralph.

“ Oh, hang the beans! Can’t you ever dry up? ”

We sat down on the bank a goodly distance apart to nurse our injured feelings. Moodily we munched on dried fruit, and swigged water. My brother’s sense of humour revived, and I told him my crazy tale. His comment was: “ You sure are a great big, blundering boob. If we ever get to the Río Yaqui, it’ll be a miracle! ”

“ But how did Prince get here so quickly? ”

“ You can’t see straight, that’s all. You’re blind in one eye and deaf in the other. An elephant would look like a giraffe to you. I saw another Prince in town and pretty nearly brought him back with me, with the worst lambasting he ever got. But I had sense enough to take a second look.”

“ What do you mean? ”

“ Just what I say. Listen close and perhaps you’ll get a glimmering of common sense — enough to gather what I’m driving at. Evidently there are many burros hereabouts that

look just like Prince. He was hid somewhere in the brush all the time. You know his tricks."

"Impossible! I —"

Prince began poking at the bean-can again.

In a renewed fit of anger I pelted him fiercely with heavy rocks. He grunted and pranced off across the wash toward Jennie and Jack.

CHAPTER VII

WATER!

I

EARLY the next morning, without stopping for breakfast, long before Venus had topped the dim horizon, we were off; and ere the sun had burst above the flat sands into the copper sky, we were miles south of Gila Bend. A U. S. geodetic survey post had announced water at the Pozo Colorado, some thirty odd miles to the south. We should have to make over fifteen miles a day — a good jolt for the burros, even for us on terrifically hot days like these. But we now had with us two five-gallon oil-cans filled with water for the burros. In our canteens were three more gallons. Little enough, for in the desert a man can consume a gallon at a gulp; two gallons a day hardly quenches the burning fever of the body. And at seven in the morning this day south of Gila Bend had already become a hell of heat. We trudged doggedly on, but as the day advanced the glare became that of a blast-furnace; the heat seethed about us stiflingly. The steady, slow rhythm of the burro hoofs was the only sound that broke the uncanny stillness of the sun-crazed world. Far to the south of us loomed the grim Saucedo Mountains, appallingly remote in spite of the transparent desert air. By twelve our clothes were sopping wet and our heads reeled from the drive of the sun. We could scarcely see from our screwed-up eyes.

At a scraggly false pepper-tree — the most prepossessing growth we had thus far encountered — we pulled off the

loads, spread one of our blankets over the branches for shade, the other on the ground to protect us from the stinging heat of the sand. We lay there panting, half sickened by the sharp, pungent odour of the oozing pepper-tree sap, and pestered by all the plagues rolled into one eruption of gnats and flies. We drank. We kept on drinking, one gulp after another, an appalling amount. All our urges turned towards water, water, water. Our bodies clamoured for water; our mouths throbbed and ached for water. We willed ourselves not to think of water. We willed not to drink. We scolded each other for mentioning water. But we drank. We kept on drinking recklessly, prodigally, not knowing when we should get more water. We soon used up all but about a quart in the canteens. The oil-cans remained. On a pinch we could rob the burros of some.

I got up to give them a sip or two. To my horror, both oil-cans were almost empty. The jolting had loosened the soldered seams. As long as the cans had been on the burros' backs, the sprung places had been on the upper side. But when we had stood the cans under the tree, most of the water had oozed out into the sand. I gave the burros what little remained and flung the worthless cans aside.

We now realized that it was high time to be eating and going on, but our wills refused to act on our leaden, perspiring bodies. We lay panting. We quarreled violently over anything, everything—the length of a shadow, the previous day's experiences, the temperature, the water. It seemed to grow hotter and hotter. Our hands trembled. Our flesh crawled. The roots of my hair felt gruesomely alive. My clothing was a rasping agony. I had an almost uncontrollable desire to tear everything off regardless of consequences. Gold was no longer our concern; we thought only of survival.

It was four o'clock before we overcame our lassitude sufficiently to think of eating. We took the lid from a can of beans

we had cooked the night before and found them a writhing putrefaction of white worms. Instead of eating, we packed the burros and travelled on far into the night.

Try as we would, the following morning we could not stir our deadened bodies into an early start. When we finally got off, the sun was topping the eastern horizon, and the air was already hot and stale.

We dragged on south. The country unrolled ever more desolate. For two days there had been no token of a thunder-storm. Fear now made us parcel our slight supply of water by the drop. We merely moistened our lips two or three times — a tantalizing procedure.

Well along in the afternoon we met a Papago Indian in cotton trousers, riding a lean cayuse toward Gila Bend. He spoke no English, but we made him understand "Agua — water." He shook his head dubiously. We asked: "*Pozo Colorado?*" He shook his head violently; his coarse black hair fell into his eyes. "*Seco, seco,*" was his guttural reply. Gila Bend, Ajo; but Pozo Colorado, no, no. "*Más allá*" — farther on. He waved his hand, indicating the other side of the mountains looming in the south-west. "*Doce leguas,*" twelve leagues, thirty-six miles.

We debated. We had only a few swallows of water left. Another day without sufficient water might see us crazy. We decided to cut across to the railroad spur running south-west from Gila Bend to Ajo, where, in a pinch, we should stand a chance of being picked up. Swinging south-west, towards sundown we reached the northern spur of the Saucedo Mountains — barren, volcanic, tufaceous. Here we camped in a gully. A few birds, fluttering from bush to bush, suggested the proximity of water. We turned the burros loose, hoping their instincts would lead them to water. But they merely drooped under the scraggly trees, flanks sucked in, too exhausted even to browse. They had been a day and a half

without water; our own supply was gone. And for two days now we had found our only sustenance in dry beans, rice kernels, and evaporated fruit.

The next day, when we set out, our small pocket compass did not function properly, perhaps on account of some iron lode. We kept on by the sun, across a rough, rolling mesa between the mountains, then over another spur. The temperature maintained itself at the top of the thermometer. We were suffering agonies now from lack of water. It required intense will to keep our parched mouths closed to conserve the natural saliva. That day dragged out its slow, fiery torture — one long monotony of boots up and down, plod, plod, plod, on through the swirling heat-waves and the eddying, acrid dust with lips cracking, eyes blinded, skull hammering with pain. Horrible red phantasms formed and reformed in our minds. Our brains no longer functioned. We did not think. Ideas spurted like bright runners of flame; pictures jumped like the intermittent play of a flash-light; impulses were quick red gashes; desires flickered, died away, leaped up. The fear of death welled in us. Yet the feeling was mingled, even in the worst moments, with a terrible fascination. For the desert has a seductive, feline cruelty. The city has steel fingers. It snuffs men out with a clamp of iron malice. But when the desert destroys men, it does so with a beautiful sweeping gesture, luring one on to death by mirages of delight and sunsets that drum their colour into the harrowed soul.

II

Just after night fell, we circled a *loma*. The burros broke into a lope that soon became a mad dash. Their loads jolted and bounced, but we could do nothing to hold them down to a sane pace. For nearly two miles they flew over the rough country, zipping through the mesquit and *palo fierro*. They

plunged down into a wash. Ahead loomed the railroad. A great mass of earth had been scooped into the wash to carry the rails across.

Water!

Against the embankment lay a muddy pool. Evidently a thunder-storm had occurred on this side of the mountains, and the water had not yet evaporated or seeped into the sand. The burros dashed pell-mell into the centre of this pool, loads and all. Standing knee-deep, they drank and drank and drank, throats gulping, flanks expanding and contracting. I feared they would burst. Then they sported with the water, soughing it through their noses, shaking it over their bodies, lifting their drenched heads high and letting it drizzle down neck and shoulder.

We kicked off our shoes, frenzied as the burros, and waded in to drink and fill our canteens. That muddy water was nectar to us. Its cool swish slid down our throats clear to the pits of our stomachs. We gloried in the softness of its flavour, rolling it around our pallets with our tongues, joying in its cool, penetrating stimulation. We washed our grimy faces, plunging our heads under the surface again and again, letting the water trickle down over our sweaty bodies.

That night we had a good meal, prepared over a crackling fire, that restored our joy and peace of mind. To us our poor beans that night had a savour finer than roast doves on silver platters. The very cellular flavour of our homely food was unlocked for us. That night for the first time in days we felt attuned to life and our universe. We again had the fresh, exalted feeling of that velvety dawn when we set out for the Harqua Hala, of that night by Dead Man's Well. We could now glory in the very difficulties of the region we were traversing. These great spaces had commanded our finest endeavour and most powerful emotions. In spite of the danger and hardship, the blinding sun, the crashing heat, the whirl

and drive of the gigantic storms, the overwhelming glare, we felt the antiphony in our inner selves of the calm cycles of day and night, peace and stress, sun and stars. The call of the quails, the plaint of the mourning doves, the lone, shrill yelping of packs of coyotes passing before the yellow moon on a black, sharp ridge — these elemental rhythms built their harmony within us.

CHAPTER VIII

BURNT IN THE MIDDLE

I

WE were now more than ever determined to reach the Río Yaqui. For a few days our fortunes were better. The following night we found water in an artesian well of a cattle ranch and, the night after, camped outside of Ajo, a smelter town. Supper over, quite late, I went into town to find out what I could about directions and to fill our canteens. The town was draped in darkness save for the gargantuan copper-smelter, bellowing in the night with a stupendous sputter and flash of violet-tinted lights. The only doors still open — the pool-room and a Chinese restaurant. For a time I walked aimlessly, enjoying the feel of paved walks. I strolled across the plaza, where a policeman, looking for vagrants, was making the rounds with a flash-light. Not wishing to be picked up, I returned to the pool-room. But no one could tell me of a defined route that would be safe to follow on south. Vague notions of a great, desolate area ending in the *médanos*, or sand-drifts of the Gulf area, were all the information vouchsafed me. Indians crossed there, but no white men. The name of one Tom Hardwick, an old-time prospector, was mentioned to me; but he had been on a drunk for a week, and couldn't be communicated with. I went up the newly cut avenues along the hills back of the town, hoping to find a U. S. survey post, or some other sign indicating the proper route, but found none. I could get no water at the pool-room; so I

crossed the long, empty road, skirting the flashing, thumping smelter, down a deserted hollow and up again to the main business street. The Chinaman knew even less about the region on south. " Muchee snakes, muchee sand, muchee sun, muchee death " was his laconic comment.

Could I fill my canteens?

" No water. Cuttee water ten o'clock."

" But you have to have water to run your restaurant. I must have water. We have to go into the ' muchee death ' to-morrow morning."

After much grunting and ill humour he finally permitted me to fill my canteens from a big galvanized tub of water, drawn from the faucets before the city supply had been cut off for the day.

II

Dawn was staining the east. We swung down from the ridge into the gully. Here at our feet swirled the water from the smelter, a light, bubbling green. There on the hill overhead thundered the stamp-mill, flashing its violet lights into the brightening sky. With methodical persistence scoops full of debris clanked out on an overhanging trolley and vomited their clinkers and sand down the side of an enormous dump.

We circled the town. A road wound south-west. We followed this toward the more open, mesa country. After an hour's journey a signpost indicated water sixteen miles further on. We met a few mestizos, Spanish-Indian half-breeds, in bright pink and blue shirts. They nodded to us surlily. The sharp glint of their white teeth contrasted startlingly with their dusky swarthinness.

The temperature this day being considerably more moderate, we decided, having got an auspicious start, to try to reach water this same night. We pushed on vigorously. But both Jennie and Jack resented the changed pace. By now Jack

was quite worn out by the severe travel which had brought him so many hundred miles from his former home in Wenden. Time and again he lagged behind to munch dried shrubs and rest; and though heretofore his filial attachment to Jennie had always brought him back to us on the run, he now became quite indifferent. A dozen times we had to go back a few hundred yards or so to drub him into following the other two burros. Prince was still sturdy and full of energy, but his hoofs had worn down rapidly from the steady marching, so that his feet hurt him.

About five we reached the Jaguar ranch, about fourteen miles from Ajo. No one was about, neither in the house nor in the stoutly built corrals, but water in a tank from a fresh artesian well was accessible for the burros and our canteens.

Two or three miles further on, we came upon another ranch, run by white people, a short, freckled Irishman and his rather pretty but tired wife. A group of Indians was camping outside the fence, and the Irishman's wife was watching them closely to see they made no raids on the garden. These Indians had the ideal conveyance for this country — a light spring wagon. In it you can carry provisions and water for the mules and horses and yourself; it is not heavy enough to get stuck in the sand; the crust of the ground is sufficiently firm in most places for the wagon to run easily between the sparse vegetation.

The next morning we reached the beginning of space, as it were. Three roads, all going towards Tucson across Burnt-in-the-Middle country, rayed east. Water on these roads was at varying distances — ninety miles, sixty miles, forty miles. By now we had enough experience to know that for us to reach water at these distances with our burros would be a superhuman feat. Besides, Tucson was not in the proper direction. We wanted to go south across the border. If water was so far off along these roads, how far would it be if we

struck across an unknown country without road or guide except our compass? We didn't know. The outlook was desperate, for this was Burnt-in-the-Middle country; and we had heard dread tales of death in Burnt-in-the-Middle country. This vast desolation stretches from Gila Bend south into Mexico. Its endless sands, its terrible sun, its shimmering, hot skies, its bony, criss-cross crags, are the home of many Gila monsters, venomous snakes, numerous centipedes, a few Indians, and an occasional border-runner. Even the coyotes, the natives say, must carry food and water if they cross this white-hot stretch of desert. Here even the ubiquitous palo-verde and cactus find scant footing. Here the ordinary thermometer blows out the top; and great whirling dust-storms choke the unwary traveller. Burnt-in-the-Middle country! We debated, staring across this vast area to the isolated mountain peaks far south — peaks bare and sharp — red flames licking at the dry sky. Burnt-in-the-Middle country!

III

We finally chose the most southerly road, thus postponing a straight cut across Burnt-in-the-Middle country as long as we could. But after a few miles the road made a sharp turn north-east, and we were forced to strike out boldly south toward the inhospitable mountains massed at the horizon. We lashed our burros to their utmost effort, determined to make time. Our lives depended upon the ground we covered these first few days when we were fresh and still had water. The map showed us the Sonoita River, sixty miles south — four days hard travelling with burros; but our prescience told us that the Sonoita River would very likely be a dead wash of bone-white stones and bleaching sands. We drove on fiercely.

Jack could not stand the pace. He kept dropping behind ever more frequently. We wasted much good energy going

back and beating him into line. About noon, with the sun sending down molten streams of flame about our heads, poor Jack keeled over and crumpled up with a little moan. We could not stop for him, much as we should have liked to, but merely removed his load, adding it to Prince's. Jack gave a few piteous bleats as we left him.

That afternoon we were obliged to abandon Jennie, too. She calmly lay down, sighed, and closed her eyes. She was not dead, but no amount of urging would make her go on. We had grown fond of both of these animals, but we had no time or energy for sentimentalizing. What had happened to them could happen to us. We avoided each other's eyes and devoted our energies to making Prince keep pace.

Late that afternoon we swung into a little valley between the mountains — to our amazement, wooded, even green in spots. Hardly had we reached it when a stiff wind blew up. In a few minutes the clouds that had been hovering over the western mountains all afternoon crept up the sky, expanding like gray yeast. Finally they grew pitch dark, enveloping the whole heavens. An abrupt calm! A sudden onslaught of furious wind, darts of lightning, a roll of thunder. The first drops were large and scattered. But soon the shower quickened, soon was whirling down. Prince obstinately refused to travel in the downpour. All our belabouring would not budge him. He stood with drooping head, more solid than the rock of ages and Gibraltar rolled into one. We took off his load and carted it under a large tree, where we covered it with our strip of canvas.

The storm grew furious. Soon the rain was driving upon us in a solid sheet — a veritable cloud-burst. Objects but a few yards distant became invisible. The thunder reverberated between the mountains in a continuous deafening roar. Our little, peaceful valley was suddenly metamorphosed into a vast bowling-alley, ringing with the idle sport of the gods

themselves. First came a long roll of thunder, then a sharp deafening crash, then a padded echo — as though the great god Thor had made a perfect ten-strike. The play went on in uproarious crescendo. And the chill of a desert storm is biting. Ten minutes previously we had been plodding under a fiery sun; now we were shivering as with the ague. The soggy weight of our clothes added to our discomfort. We hauled out our blankets, but these, too, were soon soaked through and through. Finally we removed our drenched clothes entirely, stuffing everything under the canvas. We danced around naked under the trees to keep warm.

A creaking sound. A wagon-load of Indians lumbered into view — grandparents, fathers, mothers, children galore — a migration of three generations. Unmindful of the driving rain, the women, happy-faced, pattered along behind the wagon, skirts lifted, bare feet splashing in the puddles. Then they saw us — two white men dancing naked in the rain. Queer apparitions they must have thought us, for their mirth knew no bounds, and Indians rarely display their mirth. On down the road the canvas-covered wagon creaked and lumbered; the women ran along through the rain, chattering like magpies and looking back at us, each time with new outbursts of laughter.

The rain, this strange day in this narrow valley, faded away in a purple haze just as the sun went down, a golden red glow atop the western mountain rim. The chill became intenser. The ground, the trees, the bushes, were wet and dripping, and our clothes and blankets still soaked. We wrung out the water as best we could — water — that a few hours before we had been praying for with fear in our hearts. Teeth chattering, grimly we pulled our clothes on again. We tried to start a fire, but the driving water had impregnated every piece of twig and bark and we were quite unsuccessful. We drank whisky, spread out our wet blankets in prepara-

tion for the night, expecting to freeze. But instead we were soon perspiring copiously. Our soggy clothing and blankets retained the heat of our bodies. Our compulsory Turkish bath was most unpleasant and its after effects scarcely healthful. By morning we were stiff and sore. Every muscle ached as we lifted our loads into place on Prince. We filled our canteens from one of the pools left by last night's lashing storm; fortunate, too, for a few hours after sunrise, the soil was as dry as if the country had never seen a cloud-burst.

IV

In the afternoon we came to a stoutly built, wattle-woven *casita*, facing a small field of weed-choked maize. The owner was nowhere about. A huge black spider had spun his grey web over the upper corner of the door. We followed down the road past the cornfield. Three horses flirted their tails at us and galloped on ahead in frolicsome alarm. We came to marshy ground — evidently a spring — and were soon wading up to our ankles in slush. Really the desert was mocking us and our fears about water.

We reached a field of dense tules, or reeds, out of which the Indians weave their mats. We were just emerging from this when a jolly Indian came trudging along with canteen and sarape over his shoulder. He laughed merrily at our appearance in general and at our muddy feet in particular.

The next two days were ruthlessly hot. The marshy water back at the *casita* had lured us into carelessness: we had neglected to replenish our canteens, and now suffered from lack of water. But fortunately the second day we struck a small cart-road, untravelled since the rain; the deeper ruts, beaten into hardness by passing wagons, still retained a little water. We drank some and scooped up about a pint for the canteens.

CHAPTER IX

VIVA MEXICO!

I

A QUEER monument rose above the chaparral like a stick of peppermint candy. The border post! On one side it bore the red, white, and blue, and on the other, the red, white, and green. Our blood quickened! Shade of Michael O'Shaughnessy! We were in Mexico! Gold! Adventure! Mexico!

In my school geography I recalled that Mexico was always coloured green. We looked ahead, but the map had evidently lied, for ahead was the same barren sand, the same fierce sun, the same harsh, painted mountains. An invisible line through a stretch of barren sand and underbrush and desolate mountains, two warring fetishes — United States, Mexico. The whole landscape bespoke no change. But we were in Mexico! The border post said so; it must be true. Our singing pulses told us that it was true.

About half a mile south of the border we encountered an unexpected obstacle — a five-strand wire fence, very new, very high, very tightly strung, and stretching in a straight line through the brush as far as the eye could reach, evidently to prevent cattle-rustling across the border. I climbed a tree to see if I could discover a break — a gate or some opening. But mile after mile it stretched away through the desert, from the mountains in the west to a vast hump of glittering sand dunes in the east. Waste time on a wildgoose chase for a gate? There might not be one for fifty miles. Yet how get

past this obstacle with a burro? By ourselves we could have climbed over and gone whistling on. But Prince had never been drilled in Swedish calisthenics. We had no wire-cutters, and the wire was too thick-calibred to be sawed in two with a knife. We finally hit upon the scheme of prying the staples loose from about six posts with a stout stick. Then, by standing on the topmost strand, our weight brought all the wires in to the ground, and Prince hopped over.

By this time the sky had blackened. Another storm was brewing. No time could be lost in replacing the staples. We had to find a suitable camping-place in a hurry. By the side of an old log on a hill outpost of the Ajo range we hurriedly unpacked. The wind hit us even sooner than we expected, but, before the rain had gathered force, we managed to get a fire crackling merrily about the huge dry log. We hoped that the log would keep burning even in the rain. Our hope was vain. The flames were soon beaten out. But by skilfully manipulating the log we managed to keep a little glow alight on the under side, and from this when the rain stopped — at sunset — we were able to restart a fire and dry out enough wood to replenish it from time to time.

We dried our clothes and warmed our bodies after the chill of the rain — an exquisite feeling of well-being. We kept a few embers aglow all night. A fire at night in the vastness of the open country, we had learned before this, is a companionable thing. But this night its cheering flames were particularly welcome, bringing shadowy reveries of the places we had traversed and of the past — of the people I had known, but had long forgotten, of friendships that had died, of the rush of the cities. I began thus to feel lonely, even with the companionship of the fire, a feeling of strangeness heightened by the fantastic play of shadows, the light dancing on rock and log. Beyond, by shading our eyes from the flames, we could see the mysterious heights of heaven, the

faint glimmer of several of the stronger stars. I strained my ears for the cry of animals, for the far-off sounds of the night, other than the crackling of the burning branches. Once I saw two phosphorescent eyes watching us greedily. The embers glowed weirdly but reassuringly.

II

The following day we reached the Sonoita River. Instead of being a dry wash, as we had expected, it was a raging torrent that swept along in a turbulent, yellow tide fed by the cloud-bursts of the previous days. We followed the bank down, but soon found ourselves hedged in between a sharp, impassable cliff of the Nariz Mountains and the stream. We could go no further. I climbed a slope near by. The muddy thread of the river stretched far north into the United States. So all that day we lay up between the river and the mountain, waiting for the flood to abate. But the following afternoon it rained again. This particular afternoon we made a brilliant discovery. We had learned from the thunderstorms which came at sundown, too late for wood to get dry, that it was wise to protect a few twigs and shavings. We had done thus this afternoon and were lucky enough to get a little blaze going, which we fed cautiously with the dried wood available. We had built our fire near a green bush we had often noticed and marvelled at. It suddenly caught fire and burned brilliantly, green and wet though it was. This was a valuable discovery. An ordinary match, we learned, would set these bushes afire even though they were wet, and they would then burn furiously. Our problem of starting a fire after a storm was permanently solved.

In spite of this shower, by the next day the turbulent waters of the stream had gone down considerably. We tested its depth. The water reached to our hips. If we waited an-

other day it might get still lower, but a period of hard rains seemed upon us, and we didn't dare chance it.

We planned to drive Prince across, load and all; but we had neglected to consult Prince's whims. At the water's edge he shied sharply. Nothing we could do would make him enter. Finally we unloaded him, stripped off our clothes, and carried the provisions across on our shoulders, making three trips.

But Prince without a load proved no more tractable. He would not cross. While I tugged and yanked at the rope around his neck, my brother beat him from behind. But at the brink he snorted and jumped back, every muscle quivering. Each time we pulled him too close to the water, he jerked away viciously. We lost our patience and beat him roundly. He yanked loose and, with the agility of a goat, dashed madly up the mountain-side, determined to gain his liberty for good and all. We chased after him, naked. The long, sharp cactus thorns pierced our flesh. The sharp volcanic tufa bit into our feet. Every step was torture. But we couldn't afford to lose Prince. We slipped and scrambled and flung ourselves up the steep slope. A tongue of outcropping rock finally helped us to head him off. Limping painfully, picking our path cautiously, we led him back to the stream. Our feet were bruised and cut, bristling with thorns, streaming with blood. We pulled the thorns out one by one, a most dolorous process, performed hopping on one foot, for there was no place to sit, the boulders being blisteringly hot and the ground covered with sharp rocks or cactus. The operation over, our feet still streaming blood, once more we tried to make Prince cross. A sharp prolonged struggle — and a second time he broke loose. Still naked, we raced after him again up the steep slope under the broiling sun. Once more a mad, panting scramble over sharp rocks and cactus. Once more a painful extraction of thorns. We were hopping mad, clear through.

We had been cajoling the burro, beating him, struggling with him for over an hour, and we hadn't got him across yet.

"Confound it all!" I exploded at Ralph. "What good is a college education if one can't make a fool burro cross a brook? There must be some reasonable way to make him cross, if only we could hit upon it. We're two nincompoops."

But our minds remained as empty as leaky barrels. The sun wheeled low in the west. The yellow waters swirled at our feet. But we could hit upon no way of making Prince cross. And then — bolt from the blue — an idea!

"Get out the rope," I told Ralph, "and tie it all together."

Most of it was in short lengths, but in all it made about forty feet, just enough to reach across the river. One end we tied around Prince's neck. With the other end I waded across and, finding a smooth stout branch on the opposite bank, made a half-hitch about it.

"Now get behind Prince and beat him," I called.

Dawning appreciation of my plan lighted up Ralph's face. He beat Prince with a will. At every blow Prince gave a little jump. At every jump the rope slacked. This slack I swiftly gathered in by means of the half-hitch. At every blow and every jump, Sir Prince lost a few inches of rope. At every blow and every jump he was an inch or so nearer the water. The closer he came to the water, the more frantic he grew. The more frantic he grew, the more motions he made. The more motions he made, the more slack in the rope. The more slack, the more I gathered in. The more I gathered in, the closer he came to the water. Inch by inch we gained on him. His front hoofs were in. He strained back with all his might, wrenching and jerking madly, till the rope was taut enough to break. But his struggles only brought him further into the stream. Soon he was up to his knees. Then, without warning, he zipped across the river — stone from a sling — and stood

dripping and quivering on my side. Another obstacle to reaching our goal on the Río Yaqui was behind us.

III

We went on, having various experiences, first with thunder-storms, then with long waterless stretches. Once, in a valley more favoured with vegetation than any we had seen, we came upon some unbranded cattle. Two of the cows had calves, and we conceived the idea of shooting one of them to add to our larder. We had had no meat for a long time. It somehow never occurred to us they might belong to someone.

We chased these cows for several miles without being able to shoot or lariat a calf. Suddenly we came upon an austere Indian *vaquero* standing in his stirrups behind a thick clump of bushes, and abruptly and sheepishly we abandoned our project. That evening we camped beside a small water-hole left by a brief thunder-storm. We expected to fill our canteens the following morning, but when we woke, not a trace of water, even though we dug for several feet. Passing on behind another screen of brush, we came upon the same austere, taciturn Indian cow-puncher, standing in his stirrups. Making a sign, he led us to a crystal, spring-fed pool of water, not fifty yards off.

Some days later, after cutting through a ravine and across a wide arroyo, we approached El Plomo. A sunset thunder-storm obliged us to camp hurriedly about a mile before the town. As usual we got thoroughly soaked. After the storm passed, while we were drying our clothing at a hearty fire, an Indian cantered up to us on a burro so small that the man's sandal-shod feet dragged the ground on either side. In front of him he held a chortling, naked brown baby; behind him he had tied a big bundle of dripping alfalfa. The fresh fragrance of the alfalfa was zestful to our hungry, alkali-seared nostrils.

Our visitor eyed us with naïve interest, much amused at our state. He talked for a while; then scampered off, the baby chortling gleefully, the jolting wet alfalfa flinging a shower.

The following morning we found El Plomo in a sad way. A cloud-burst had hit the town with its heavy waters. Adobe walls were melted, houses flooded. The principal lane was a mess of water and mud. The women waded through it, skirts caught up high on their shapely, bare brown legs; the children paddled merrily; the men stalked about, trousers rolled to the crotch. We were glad we had camped on the high, dry ground outside of the town. Here in El Plomo, we met several old-time Mexican miners and Indians who told us of fabulous treasures over toward the west coast. They warned us time and again of the dangers, but we did not believe that these could be any worse than the ones we had already been through and suddenly made up our minds to postpone our trip to the Río Yaqui for several weeks and at least have a look at the country.

CHAPTER X

TOMATOES, CRACKERS, AND ANTS

I

NOT for two weeks, but for a whole month, Ralph and I criss-crossed the stark, bone-white desert of the Gulf of California coast, from harsh red crag to harsh red crag. Before us, now, on the heat-dancing horizon, were the tall date-palms of Altar. It had been a long, profitless month. From San Perfecto we had zigzagged under the humming, hot sun to Quitobás and Soquete. Our burro had scraped his load against the tall, column-like saguaro cactuses and the sharp-thorned stalks of the paloverde all the way from Macaraya to Palomas. For days on end we had tracked among the dead, bleached stones of lost rivers. Night after night we had toiled up long, broken slopes under the silver moon toward strange summits, where Jordan palms poked their shaggy arms against the opaque sky. We had gone from Palomas to Cienguilla one night when the Milky Way was like a gilt banner across the heavens, and the coyotes wailed in the sand dunes. A thunder-storm had driven us from Caborca to Pitiquito with the sword of its terrible lightning, and the thunder, rolling from crag to cliff, had mocked our drenched plight. And the fire of an unearthly sunset had showered on us from over the waters of the Gulf opposite the Island of Sharks; and night had come with a soft lapping of wavelets against the monotonous, sandy shore. South of Alamo Muerto a score of rattlers had leapt writhing from their

nests to strike at us, and in a broken mud hovel of Antimonio I had lain like a dead man with sunstroke and fever. We had picked and shovelled for gold by a red *tinaja* beyond Las Minas Pintas, and by day the mourning doves had called from greasewood and ocotillo; and by night the owls had hooted from their nests in the saguaros. We had stumbled a second time into the huddle of storm-washed huts in El Plomo, blind from the heat and dying of thirst. But we had found no gold, and with but eighty-odd dollars and Prince we were now heading for the town of Altar.

II

The flat-roofed pueblo with its soft pink walls lay in the curved arm of the Magdalena River. Its streets wound among gardens and orchards. Grapes hung from high terraces in huge, purple clusters; scarlet tomatoes gleamed among the corn stalks; and the yellow gourds and chayote vines hung down over red, adobe walls and from the mammoth plum-trees. All around stretched the hot desolation of the Sonora coast country; but Altar was a luxuriant Eden.

At a prosperous little orchard we purchased a bucketful of grapes and tomatoes. The happy proprietors, a middle-aged couple — a round, plump pair of partridges they were — invited us to rest under the wide arbours back of the house. He led me through his garden, where one of the neighbour boys, a little sliver under a gigantic sombrero — a veritable toadstool — was irrigating tomato vines. Near a trellis, at the foot of which gleamed an enormous, gloriously wet toad, my host reached up to pick me some bright yellow flowers. Noticing my pleasure, he straightway led me to his flower garden, a riot of brilliant colours. Later, under the arbour, his wife regaled us with food: cheese and crisp *tortillas*. *Tortillas*, Mexico's substitute for bread, are made of

corn previously soaked in lye-water over night. The lye-water softens the hard hulls and prevents pellagra, though this treatment is not too beneficial to the stomach. The softened corn is ground on the stone metate until it is a paste — a process requiring hours of back-breaking labour. The paste, or *masa*, is then patted into flat cakes, thin as paper, with a skilful rotary motion of flat palms. The unsalted cakes are toasted on a flat, ungreased tin, and are best when eaten crisp and hot. Cheese, meat, beans, and chilies are rolled up in them to make a sort of cylindrical sandwich. In eating beans or stews the *tortilla*, bent into a trowel-like shape, serves excellently in lieu of a spoon. These stuffed corn pancakes are very filling and it is little wonder that *tortillas*, cheese, and *frijoles* — the last the Mexican's equivalent for the Chinaman's rice — form the staple, unvarying diet of the poorer classes all over the Republic.

III

We had been wandering for nearly two months on the Mexican side of the desert and had appreciated very vividly that Mexican ways are not those of the United States, but we still had to learn that a pueblo store doesn't carry the numerous commodities to be found in the corner grocery of our own Gopher Prairies. We wanted soda crackers to put into our cooked tomatoes — soda crackers in a land of *tortillas*. We might as well have asked for the aurora borealis. We certainly shouldn't have had half so much difficulty making ourselves understood. I had left home with a few Spanish phrases floating around in my cranium, like loose straws, but my steady use of my little red-backed Laird and Lee dictionary had by now given me an almost intelligible vocabulary. When I needed a new word I searched for it diligently, often making the illuminating discovery — usually too late for the

immediate occasion — that some words in this precious dictionary were wrong, many too literary; the exact meaning of others was impossible to ascertain. Often the dictionary gave half a dozen equivalents. "Spring," for instance, might mean anything from a season to a bubble of water, a jump to a part of a watch. Thus, when we wanted to buy crackers, soda crackers, plain ordinary soda crackers, our Laird and Lee gave only plebeian "cracker," and stuck after it four or five other words. "*Fanfarrón*" looked as good as any; so we marched up to the Japanese proprietor of the general store — in all of Sonora the stores are largely in the hands of orientals — and without a qualm of misgiving asked for half a kilogram of *fanfarrones*. He stared at us in approved oriental polite and enigmatic fashion. We repeated our request. He shook his head, most puzzled. We asked again. He called on half a dozen Mexican bystanders to help him interpret. They snickered, but politely pointed to every object in the store. Finally we were offered *pantalones* — blue, bulldog overalls. We went off empty-handed, and not till many moons had passed did I discover that I had asked for half a kilogram of "four-flushers" or Southern crackers.

That night we camped a mile east of the town. For more than a month we had eaten no fruit or fresh vegetables. Now we continued our "spree" begun back there in the hospitable garden, gorging ourselves on grapes and plums. We opened a can of sardines and cooked big batches of tomatoes and cabbage and ate lettuce and fruit without stint. We ate and kept on eating. The following morning I paid the piper. A griping pain in my stomach and intestines doubled me up like a jack-knife. Nauseated, I began to vomit and kept on vomiting. Nothing brought relief. I spent the whole day writhing in pain and groaning aloud. My brother miraculously escaped ill consequences.

IV

To get on our way to the Río Yaqui we had to reach Santa Ana, a town on the railroad line, a fifty-mile jump from Altar. I was still shaky when we set out. The day proved unusually hot, like those back in Burnt-in-the-Middle country. About three miles out of Altar we stopped at a thatched farm-house to get water. The owner, a most primitive type of Seri Indian, with coarse black hair hanging down into the bovine eyes of his massive, brutal face, gruntingly gave us leave to fill our canteens from a pond back of his cabin. But when we saw that his dammed-up water was used indiscriminately for drinking, bathing, watering cattle, and general cesspool, we went on, trusting to the information given us back in Altar that there was plenty of water along the road. But, to our dismay, that dirty pool was the last available supply.

Still sick from my attack of indigestion, I was unable to walk fast. We covered but little ground, and by the second day we were suffering from lack of water. To cap the climax I became desperately ill with dysentery, and we were compelled to waste another half day lying under the scrubby trees. The country from here on was parched, desolate, starkly naked. The sun poured its molten fire full upon us. After an eternity of plodding, boots crunching the gravel crust of the ground, up and down, up and down, we came upon a small, artificial *ramada* of palm leaves, erected here in the midst of the sun-seared emptiness by some saintly wayfarer. For nearly four hours we crouched under its meagre shade, saved from sunstroke, but still tortured by our quenchless thirst. We abused ourselves roundly for not having taken a route which, though more circuitous, was travelled by teamsters carrying ore from Caborca; we quarrelled violently

with each other for not having filled our canteens at the Indian's *jacal*. We simmered there, weak, sick, discouraged, panting from the heat. The dancing light flickered over the steep, barren slopes. In our distorted, febrile imaginations, these burning vibrations became the dancing puppets of death. A great invisible hand seemed to be striking the very earth into agitated waves that heaved toward us in dizzy succession.

Fear drove us on. We left our miserable shelter and dragged along the trail with leaden feet, crazed with thirst and heat. My vitality ebbed with every step. For over two days I had not eaten; for over two days we had tasted no water. And the more we walked, the more fantastic and terrible became my thoughts. They pricked me into impotent resentment at myself, at life, at our labours, at my brother. They focused upon his plodding, sweat-stained back. All the inevitable irritations of mutual travel drew together into one tangled skein of hate toward him. My unsteady brain conceived of him as an evil genius, responsible for this agony of sickness and thirst. I had, actually, a desire to kill him. I pictured the process. In my fevered imagination I drew out my knife; I crept stealthily toward him. I lifted up the blade with all my remaining strength. Uttering a cry, I plunged it into his ribs.

At this moment my head reeled. I seemed to see black cows in the brush, and I plunged into the dirt.

Someone was forcing water between my teeth. My eyes flickered open. My brother! I cried out with fright. So real had been my last images that for the moment I was unable to believe him alive. And then I drank, gulp after gulp, until Ralph wrenched the canteen from my shaking, taut grasp. Upon reviving again, I looked about me. We were lying in a little gully under some scrub-oaks.

"After you fell," explained Ralph, "I dragged you here."

He gave me some more water. In spite of its peculiar bitter taste and odour, it was nectar to my greedy lips. I gulped till my stomach bulged.

"Where did you get it?" I asked him.

"I saw some cows in the brush" (I now remembered the black cows I had seen just as I collapsed); "I thought there must be water near by; so I skirmished about." —

The next day I felt able to go with Ralph to the source of the water on the other side of a hill, under a clump of trees.

The filthiest pool imaginable! A dozen cows were cooling themselves in that water. It was vile with yellow excrement.

V

At Santa Ana we camped across the river on the edge of a cornfield under some large poplar-trees. For two days we lay there, bathed, rested, washed our clothes.

Plaza loiterers advised us to take the railroad on south from Santa Ana to Hermosillo, the capital of the state, as the Yaqui Indians were on the war-path down near Hermosillo. All trains were running under heavy-armed escort, and a person travelling alone, unprotected, they warned us, was risking his life. We were terribly tired out. Going by train tempted us. But we had so little money, no presentable clothes, and were doubtful about deserting Prince. In the end the open road won. We telegraphed to California for clothes and set out on foot to Hermosillo, hoping to arrive there at the same time as our belongings, and rest up a bit before going on to the Yaqui River.

At Llano, a scrubby adobe town, we refilled our canteens and camped about three miles south in a flat, open space surrounded by dense, tropical vegetation.

The days were still very hot, but the nights, heavy with dew, were growing chilly, so that, though we built fires each

evening, we woke in the morning with our eyelashes fuzzy with moisture, our blankets soaked, and our joints stiff. This particular night we struck camp after dark — we set fire to a huge, fallen tree. The trunks and all its twisted arms flashed into so huge a blaze that we had to spread our blankets fully twenty feet away. As the night advanced, the hot flames subsided, and we gradually moved our blankets closer and closer.

We had hardly dozed off to sleep when I woke up, my body a mass of burning itches. I scratched and tossed and could not go to sleep again. With our search-light I examined my blankets. They were swarming with tiny red and black ants. Around about, the ants had pushed up hundreds of tiny hills. Scarcely a square foot without two or three little eruptions of granulated earth. On our trip we had come across many kinds of ants, little ants, big ants, huge red ants, and black ants, and red and black ants, and white ants, as many varieties as rats in Hamelin town. Some were fully half an inch long and were like three large beads with antennae. We frequently found these ants on our bodies or in our food. The little pis-ants had been the most annoying. They swarmed over everything, and we had constantly to keep a careful eye on our food. But nowhere until now had we found so many ants in one spot. We found ant-hills everywhere. No other higher, rockier ground was in sight. The country about was low, storm-washed, dense with vegetation, reeking with reptiles and unpleasant insects. We had to stick to the cleared space and endure the pests as stoically as we could. When we got up the next morning, our bodies were red and itchy, blotched as with scarlet fever.

CHAPTER XI

QUEROBABI'S JAIL

I

QUEROBABI, flat-roofed, dusty, quaintly angled Quero-babi, smouldering under the hot sun.

At an inviting, cool doorway we sat down to rest. A drowsy, moon-faced mestizo, hunched cross-legged, was carving a leather purse. His wife, weaving a *petate* from reeds gathered at the river-bottom a mile south of the town, got up, groaning amiably from her cramped legs, to give us a cool, pleasant drink — slightly fermented cactus juice in painted terra-cotta cups. A grown daughter, Esperanza, passed in and out, red jars of water on her head for the clothes which she was scrubbing on a flat stone in the garden at the rear. She swayed gracefully as she crossed the threshold, and smiled, exposing sugar-white teeth between red lips — a sharp contrast with her black skin and black, shiny hair.

A young fellow cantered up on a pony. His clean, starched, blue shirt was open at the throat; "chaps" adorned his corduroy trousers; a broad cartridge-belt hung about his hips, and a pearl-handled revolver peeked from a holster. His spurs were long-rowelled, cruel, Spanish affairs. His high-pommeled saddle was ornately carved. An ugly double bit kept his pony cavorting and flecked its mouth with red foam. The old folks did not greet him too cordially, but the girl blushed — "You here again, José?" — then scrubbed and slapped her clothes with unusual energy. He talked with her

awhile. The mestizo, her father, carving the purse, got up to show me a carved leather shoulder-bag which he hoped I would buy.

A cry from Esperanza! José pranced in through the rear door, laughing, a damp streak down his blue shirt. Munching a quince and still laughing, he swung on to his pony, flinging it down the narrow street with a wild shout and a scurry of hoofs.

II

My brother and I filled our canteens at the quite modern town pump, then turned into a lane crossing the railroad tracks. A heavy, fat-faced individual nodded to us cheerfully, but stared at us from half-closed, pulpy eyelids. We had hardly gone five yards when he called to us in an insolent tone to stop. "Where are you going?—Where do you come from?—What are you doing here?"

We answered the series guardedly.

"Your passports?" he demanded, sinking his double chin pontifically upon his gray flannel shirt and tapping his chest lightly with his plump hand.

"I'm the constable. —" He paused. "Station-agent. —" Another pause. "And postmaster. —" A third pause. "You have to have passports to cross the border. Come over to the station."

We followed him inside. Pointing to several blanks on the telegraph desk, he told us to write down our names. It was at the time when ill feeling between the United States and Mexico was running very high; sniping had been going on between border troops, and some days previously forty Mexicans had been killed in a frontier scrimmage at Nogales. For these reasons we had agreed to call ourselves Swiss when questioned with malice aforethought. I now wrote "Karl Weitman" in German script.

He looked at this and grunted, clearly doubting our claim to be Swiss instead of American. "Where did you cross the border?" he demanded.

"We didn't," I lied. "We outfitted up in Hermosillo to go prospecting."

He sniffed. "Whom do you know in Hermosillo?"

I was getting in deeper than I had bargained for. On the spur of the moment I invented a name. "Jim Larkin, an Irishman."

"Where does he live?"

(Still deeper.) "At—at the Hotel—Hotel Esperanza." (The name of the girl of the red jar had served me in good stead.) "And he has our passports," I added.

"Hm. No excuse. All foreigners have to carry passports with them." (This we knew to be a lie, but waited to see what his game might be.) "Besides I never heard of the Hotel Esperanza in Hermosillo." He drummed on the desk with the tips of his pudgy fingers. "How did you get into Mexico?"

"By way of Vera Cruz."

"You've been in the country some time. Why don't you speak Spanish better?" He fired this question at us with a side squint while he lighted a black-paper cigarette.

"As we came with our friend Jim Larkin, who knows Spanish, we let him do all our talking."

"Hm." He sat down on the edge of the desk, one foot on the floor, the other thumping the wall. "How did you come to Sonora?"

"Over the mountains," I replied casually, pretending to be interested in a yellow cur snooping under the desk.

"Through Chihuahua," I added.

"From Chihuahua!" He stared at us. Chihuahua was just then being terrorized by Pancho Villa, and we should also have had to cross the territory of the terrible Yaqui

Indians. He broke into rapid gesturing speech with a clerk in the office.

"What places have you been to in Mexico?" he demanded inquisitorially.

Not feeling myself too secure in Mexican geography, I asked for a map. On it I sketched a mythical route.

"*Cá!* And from where did you come to Mexico?" he interrupted.

I requested a map of the world. He ransacked some drawers, holding his head sideways to keep the cigarette smoke out of his eyes, mumbling the while, and finally pulled out a small Mercator's projection. I pointed out British Honduras.

"Really!" He accepted my invention, thick lips drawn back from his glistening white teeth in real surprise. He was clearly interested and leaned forward, elbow on knee. "When did you leave Switzerland?"

"I ran away from home when I was fourteen, and I've been travelling around the world."

My story-telling instinct was now hot on the scent of the fantastic. I traced a most complicated, bizarre route through Europe, down the Balkans, into Turkey — "Beautiful women there, veils over their faces —" into Egypt — "Pyramids there!"

The constable grew excited. He threw away his cigarette. The yellow cur jumped back from it with a low snarl.

Suez I took at a jump and raced across Arabia like a flying bedouin. Afghanistan was a wave of the hand; the jungles of India were child's play. Singapore's heat didn't faze me in the least. Australia was a bagatelle disposed of in two sentences. In the Philippines I fought savages, and smoked opium in China. Japan — "Cherry trees and geisha girls there." I winked and rolled my tongue.

"You *are* a traveller!" he exclaimed time and again, as I

hopped, skipped, and jumped airily from country to country. "There too! There too!" He almost stammered in his excitement.

At last I stopped. He meditated, heavy jowls drawn down against his chest.

Then an abrupt decision. He jumped from the desk with a thud that shook the loose, board floor.

"Anyway you are under arrest. Only we have no jail."

He put his plump hand to his plump cheek thoughtfully, staring out the open door. "Ha! Go sit under that tree." He indicated a big pepper-tree beside a large adobe house on the other side of the tracks. Beyond it several acres of corn-stubble fields extended to the bushes and trees alongside a small arroyo. We stared across the tracks. "That pepper-tree?"

"Yes, exactly." He patted his cartridge-belt affectionately. "You are under arrest. You are in jail in Querobabi. Don't go 'way."

"How long must we sit there?"

"As long as you are in jail. I'll telegraph to Hermosillo." Once more he waved his hand urbanely toward the pepper-tree.

III

Apprehensively we crossed the tracks and sat down in Querobabi's jail. Our jailer had come to the door of the station to see that we disposed of ourselves in the proper place. We could make out his expression of mingled amazement and surliness.

I have experienced worse jails and worse torments. This jail was paradise compared to the road between Altar and Santa Ana, compared to many a mean hole we had crawled into on the desert. We unloaded Prince and lay down lazily under the tree — in Querobabi's jail — and stared up

through the lacy branches. It was a placid, languorous, swan-like day. A cool breeze rustled the leaves. We drowsed.

"*Buenos días, señores.*" A girl's timid voice. We sat up in amazement.

An Indian girl stood before us with two terra-cotta cups. "My mother," she said shyly, with a slight tilt of her little head and smooth, tightly braided black hair, "asked me to bring you something to drink."

"Cactus juice, eh?" I surveyed the contents and the yellow scrolls on the outside of the glazed cup. On one side I deciphered "Elisa" and asked: "Is your name Elisa?"

"Yes sir." A slight curtsy. "Elisa Barreda, your humble servant."

"Not so bad!" remarked Ralph. "The first prisoners I ever heard of who were permitted to have an humble servant in jail."

Then in Spanish I said to her: "And what is the name on the other cup? — Juanito? — Ah, the name of your sweetheart."

She hung her head, speaking softly. "No, my little brother, the little fellow playing in the doorway."

"But what is your sweetheart's name?"

She coloured prettily, nervously twisting her dress. "I have no sweetheart. Who would care for me?"

"Everybody, my pretty *señorita*. I am sure you have a sweetheart."

"No, *señor*, I'm not pretty. No one would care for me."

We drank to the health of our pretty visitor and her gracious mother and the unknown sweetheart.

"You are very kind ——" In sudden confusion she pattered off with the empty cups. But soon she was back, and every half-hour thereafter, most eager for our flattery. Time and again we drank to her, her sweetheart — which began to make her playfully angry — to her mother, to the world in

general, everybody but the good-for-nothing constable, postmaster and station-agent keeping us here in durance vile in this Querobabi jail.

IV

We soon became a Mecca for all the curious. Visitors trooped up from every direction. They fraternized, paid their respects, and sauntered off. We sat on the high roots of the tree, more like potentates holding open court than jail-birds. The old men of the village remained as our courtiers. These patriarchs croaked to us and to each other like an Aristophanic frog chorus, telling of all the strangers who had ever passed through Querobabi.

Ralph and I, to keep up appearances, constantly talked in pidgin-German. Also we made out an itinerary and life chronicle, writing it in German script, with dates, for the benefit of that protean person — constable, postmaster, and station-agent — our jailer. This I took across to him to peruse at his leisure.

He stared at the script with a vague, open-jawed expression; then turned to his assistant. "Yes, I guess they must be Swiss all right. Gringos — Americanos — don't write this way. — "By the way," he asked me casually, "how much money have you?" He formed a circle with thumb and forefinger to indicate a coin. "Money, money," he repeated.

"About eighty dollars," I replied.

"All right" — this in English. He waved me back to the tree jail. His manner was ominous. He had put the question much too significantly.

I became perturbed. Under the pretext of tending to nature's needs, I crawled under the fence, went over behind the bushes along the edge of the arroyo, and there, in the sand, I buried the eighty dollars under some well-defined roots.

About four that afternoon our constable, etc., summoned

us to the office. "You have been fined eighty dollars," he announced affably, "for not having a passport."

"But I told you I have a passport in Hermosillo. Did you telegraph?"

He smiled blandly. "You always have to have your passports on your person."

"Did you telegraph to Hermosillo?" I persisted. "What answer did you get?"

He scowled. "That's all right. You're fined eighty dollars." He patted his full stomach delicately.

"How am I fined eighty dollars? I've had no — no ——" I could not hit upon the Spanish word for "trial."

"Come, come, eighty dollars," he demanded brusquely.

I shrugged and made a show of looking through my pockets. With feigned surprise I made a more rapid and excited search. I turned my pockets inside out, one after another. "The money's gone."

"Gone! What do you mean, gone?" the constable demanded menacingly. "It's in your load." He pointed to our supplies across the tracks.

"Go look. It's not there. I always carry it in this pocket."

"Come now, what did you do with it?" He spat nervously in the direction of the yellow cur.

"I've lost it. Somebody stole it. If you're going to steal, you want to be the early bird."

His thick neck swelled and flushed. "Come on in here." He led us into another room, where he searched us carefully.

"Now you let *me* telegraph," I demanded, determined to make the most of my bluff. "I'm going to telegraph the Swiss minister in Mexico City, and you'll lose your job."

"You can't telegraph. You've no money." He looked at me suspiciously.

"You've kept us here all day. Somebody stole our money in your good-for-nothing jail" — I waved my hand toward

the pepper-tree. "So you have to pay for the telegram — or you can send it collect."

He pulled his assistant into another room. They talked in low voices for a few minutes; then popped out again. "You're fined eighty dollars," he persisted. "You've lost it. If we had a jail, we'd make you stay in it. You can go now, but if you ever come to Querobabi again, you'll be rearrested. Go."

"Go where?"

"Wherever you wish. You are free — *libres, libres!*" He said the word as if he were presenting us a pass into paradise.

"I want to telegraph." My insistence grew. "And it's up to you to make good the eighty dollars."

He waved his hands at us as though shoosing a flock of chickens. "You are free, free. You can go, south, south." His arm circled grandiloquently. "South to Hermosillo." He became very polite. He held out his hand, smiling engagingly.

I ignored his hand. Over my shoulder, as I went out, I reminded him that he was responsible for the loss of the eighty dollars and that I would get the Swiss minister after him.

V

A mile south of town an iron bridge spanned a tiny, sluggish stream, flowing between high, red banks. We camped near some *palo fierro* trees. Leaving Ralph here, I followed down the sharp-cut sandy bottom alongside the stream. In about twenty minutes — it was now late afternoon — I came to the mouth of the side arroyo near which I had buried the money. Striking back along this, I soon neared the town again. To eliminate a big bend I risked cutting across the fields, but avoided the cultivated patches and the cabins. At sight of the large adobe house where Elisa, the mestiza girl lived, I dropped to my knees and peered through the brush.

Elisa was sewing under the tree that had been Querobabi's jail. The station huddled on the opposite side of the tracks. Querobabi's constable, postmaster, station-agent, and local boss was leaning against the door-frame, his hands poked down through the belt on his paunch, a living epitome of all the local tyranny and injustice that has been Mexico's curse for so many centuries.

I crawled along on my hands and knees to the bush where I thought I had left the money. I dug away the sand. The money did not appear. I dug more earnestly. No money! I dug frantically, pawing wildly, like a dog after a bone, the earth flying from under my clawing fingers. No money! I sat on my haunches and looked about me helplessly. That damn' station-agent! There he was, leaning against the door-jamb, cigarette drooping from his thick mouth. I looked at the hole before me. I sifted the loosened earth through my trembling fingers. I dug some more. No use. No money! Gone! What in blazes should we do without money, here in a foreign country, in an outlandish place, without a cent, with no friends, no means of earning? How could we eat? How should we live? How should we get on the Río Yaqui?

But dusk was sifting through the darkening trees. I should have to get back to my brother. I stared about me through the brush at the haze on the far mountains, where a great stone cliff gleamed golden in the dying twilight. Near by I heard the dingle of a cow-bell, soft voices, the hum of insects.

As I got to my feet, a branch brushed my eye. I dropped to my knees, clapping my hand to the injured member. My good eye fell on another set of roots. They looked exactly like the ones under which I had been frantically digging. I looked about me. There were any number of roots just alike in the gathering dusk. I calculated the path I had taken after crawling through the fence back there near Querobabi's jail, now a black shadow around which fluttered hundreds of quarrel-

ling blackbirds. If only I could go to the fence and follow back along my original course, I was sure that then I could find the right place. But from this side it was bewildering. I pawed around several more roots, each time more frantically as twilight deepened and the light faded. I sat down again, giving vent to despair. The gnats buzzed around my face. A light gleamed from the station window. I heard hoofs down the invisible street and the rhythmical clang and swish of the town pump.

Had someone seen me bury the money? Had someone suspected my purpose when I had crawled through the fence? Had they followed up my tracks? What a mess!

It was almost dark now. I looked around desperately, crawled a little further. Another bunch of roots. Yes, this was the spot. I burrowed eagerly. The bill-case with the eighty dollars jumped into my hand. I thrust the money into my pocket.

Cautiously I stood up, looked about me, and listened. The still, southland air rustled about me. I jogged back to the wash, slid down a cut in the bank, and stumbled along the boulder-strewn bottom. The figure of a man loomed in front of me out of the night.

I shrank back.

His sandals scraped on the stones. With a soft "*Buenas noches, señor,*" he passed me and was swallowed up like a shadow in the dark.

I ran on, hard as I could, through the sliding sands to where I had left my brother.

CHAPTER XII

PENNILESS

I

BEYOND Pozo we camped on a grassy spot at a deserted well. Here we found a swarm of repellent neighbours. Among a mess of stones and myrtles we discovered several tarantulas — repulsively black and hairy. While I was squatting before the fire, cooking, a huge iguana came wiggling across the open. I stood up and went forward. It stopped, raised itself loathsomely up and down on its forelegs, and hissed. It displayed utterly no fear. In fact, as long as I paid attention to it, the creature boldly advanced in my direction. But as soon as I went off, pretending not to notice it, the reptile walked warily toward the brush. I practised my marksmanship on it with our little Colt. But, unable to hit it, I finally broke its neck with a club.

That night I was half aroused from a deep sleep by a sharp stinging pain in my leg. Suddenly I felt a large object against my neck. With a howl I brushed it off and fumbled around for the flashlight that I always kept beside me.

When I threw the pale circle of light over the ground, I saw nothing. I shook out my blanket. No trace of the monstrosity that had lain against my neck. Numbers of times before, I had been awakened in just this manner by tree mice that had come down to nestle against my throat for warmth. I had frequent nightmares of getting bubonic plague from their bite. But this time I felt that my late visitant was not a

mouse but something else — evidently it had bit my leg a little above the knee; hence the stinging sensation I had felt half-consciously probably for five minutes or more. Turning my flash-light on the wound, I saw two little punctures in the centre of a swollen area. I squeezed the flesh, and a colourless drop of liquid exuded. The rapidity with which the swelling had set in alarmed me. Taking my knife, I slit open the wound, cutting deeply for half an inch. My leg bled profusely. After dressing the cut, I took a swig of whisky — about half a tumblerful — then lay down again, trying to sleep. But I remained conscious of the pain and dozed but fitfully.

The next morning the upper part of my leg was swollen badly — almost half again the normal size, and around the wound was an ugly red inflammation. When I stood up, the pain was excruciating. We loaded up Prince and set out. But after a quarter of a mile I had to give up. We decided to lie up for the day. Ralph, more alarmed than I, wanted to go on ahead to Carbo to see whether a doctor could be found. But Carbo was probably like Pozo, just a huddle of huts, and I voted against his going.

An Indian came dog-trotting along with a load of charcoal strapped to his back, and we asked him where a doctor could be found.

He shrugged, drawing his lips down at the corners. The nearest doctor was in Hermosillo, the capital. "If you could have made the morning train, you could have got to Hermosillo to-night. But the trains pass only every other day. You've just missed one."

I showed him my wound. He shook his head apprehensively, laid down his load, and went off. Pretty soon he came back with some leaves. These he crushed between clean stones; then applied them to the wound. I drank some more whisky.

By evening my leg seemed a little better. The following morning most of the pain had subsided. When I stood up, the swelling bunched down near the knee-cap — a hardish lump about the size of my fist. On lying down again, this distributed itself, and my leg seemed scarcely swollen.

We set out. Walking was still painful and did my leg no good, for when we camped at noon, the swelling was worse again.

It began to rain, a steady drizzle. We found a deserted *jacal* in the centre of a field of volunteer corn. A huge grinding-stone, hewn out of solid rock, fully six feet in diameter, with a long arm for the guiding horse or mule, was fastened to the central cylindrical grinder, also of hewn stone. Ages old the contraption looked, old as Carthage or Egypt, a grim, monolithic deity.

The interior of the *jacal* was mouldering; fleas stung us without respite. But we lay up here all afternoon, gazing out over the wet fields and mist-draped hills, listening to the soothing patter of the drops on the whispering corn leaves and the thatch over our heads. We passed the time studying our map, planning our route to the Río Yaqui.

The rain continued far into the night, but the following morning was clear and sunny. The early light glinted on the bejewelled leaves and cobwebs in the long grass. Too, practically all evidence of my mishap had disappeared except the slight, festering cut I had made with my knife.

II

Hot, glaring days followed. As we neared Hermosillo everyone warned us against the dangerous Yaquis. "They are on the war-path. They spare no one. They torture their prisoners. They cut off the soles of their prisoners' feet, burn their captives at the stake, beat them to death with clubs."

We laughed at these fantastic Alliedesque tales and kept on our way. On this side of a hill a few miles from Hermosillo we met eight Mexicans in a Ford, all armed with rifles. They became very excited upon seeing us and stopped to find out whether we had run any danger or had any experiences with the Yaquis. It seemed that the Yaquis just the night before had attacked the very outskirts of Hermosillo and had demonstrated their civilization by cutting off the hands of an eight-year-old girl and shooting a Chinaman through the belly.

Topping a rise at the fag-end of a blistering hot day, we gained a view of the Horcasitas River, that circles the flat-roofed city. A vision of Zion! Tropical, oriental! The river meandered through a richly cultivated country of corn and sugar-cane, of blooming orchards and groves of oranges and tall date-palms. The shadowy depressions and sun-kissed eminences were dotted with tiled or thatched adobe houses. Green fences of growing cactus enclosed corral and garden, wisps of smoke curled up from the chimneys; and the Little Hill of the Bells — *El Cerrito de las Campanillas* — shimmered in the sun, its red and white slope scratched with hundreds of scrambling paths that twisted in and out among the shacks and the cactus and the protruding seams of shale and hornblende.

We swung down through the mess of adobe buildings along a zigzag, ochre lane that rambled along the river to the main road — *el camino real*. Alongside in the sedgy irrigation ditch, peasant women in bright coloured blouses were washing clothes, which they had boiled in huge, terra-cotta bowls over fires in improvised *braseros*. The bushes were thick with the reds and blues of washed skirts and waists. Some of the women were bathing. An old hag, white hair streaming over her wrinkled, lemon-coloured face and knife-like shoulders, one broken tooth protruding from her shrivelled gums, was

guarding a flock of gabbling geese with a long cord attached to a hand-polished stick.

Our *entourage* attracted much curiosity. A little crowd of loungers escorted us to a store, where we bought sugar and canned goods. I let Prince eat the labels off the tin cans, which amused our new friends greatly. We passed through the city.

At one crossing a squashy busy-body in a chequered vest and turn-down collar stopped us officiously to ask us pointed, inquisitive questions — a replica of the Andalusian road companion of Washington Irving.

Curtly we informed the dumpy stranger that we were miners. Without ceremony he lifted up the canvas from our boxes to peek inside. I gave Prince a sharp jab. The edge of the box scraped Sir Nosy Body's nose. He stood staring after us with open mouth, holding on to his skinned beak amazedly.

After the lonely desert this little city with its ten or twelve thousand inhabitants seemed quite a metropolis. It was Sunday afternoon, and most places were closed. We proceeded on to the outskirts of town, where we camped under some pepper-trees close by the small adobe house of a dirty hermit — a short, squat fellow, with heavy, sottish features, black, unkempt beard, and mangled hands. His clothing — dirty cotton trousers and an under-shirt black with age — was so rotten it scarcely held together.

III

The next afternoon was overpoweringly hot. We drowsed in the scant shade of the trees, listening to the rustle of the fern-like leaves over our heads and the far, droning noises of the town, wafted to us through the still, dry air — stray calls, the sound of wheels, the call of street hawkers. After the long, empty, desert hush of the past months, our sensitive ears drank in these sympathetic sounds thirstily. About four

o'clock the liquid notes of the plaza band — queer bursts of unfamiliar melody — flowed along the quickening breeze, poignantly sweet, and the silver skirl of trombones wrought in us vague feelings of homesickness.

Lying here on the edge of a bare field in the lee of this strange city of a strange race, we felt singularly isolated, alone. All the inexpressible ache of the unfamiliar that haunts one in a foreign land, however long one remains, clutched us with sharp intensity. Our thoughts flowed into a conglomeration of pleasure and pain; the difficult days just passed melted into gloomy fear and keen expectation of the days to come.

We had less than eighty dollars, but on the other hand we expected to find our clothes waiting us at the express office. But, when we went there Monday morning, we were disappointed. And a telegram of inquiry to the States brought no reply. We were most anxious to rehabilitate ourselves, for our trousers were patched beyond recognition and our khaki shirts torn and streaked with stains of sweat and travel. After our long weeks in the desert the urge in us to regain contact with the ordinary routine of city life, to feel at leisure and well dressed, became imperative. We wanted decent attire and a decent hotel, where we could bathe and loll around for a day or two before lighting out for the Río Yaqui, or looking for a temporary job if it seemed wiser. Come what might, we had to have something clean. Since I, being older, was the more likely candidate for a job, should we have to look for one, it was decided that I should get a few necessary things.

At a small haberdashery I ate into our scant capital by purchasing a silk shirt, a tie, and a new hat. Fortunately the heat made a coat unnecessary. Hailing a cab, I drove to the outskirts of town for Ralph. My dapper appearance quite floored him.

We decided to desert Prince and willed him to a passing

Indian. We made quite a ceremony of it, telling the Indian all of Prince's good points to impress him with the fact that the animal deserved the best of treatment. And indeed it was as hard to part with Prince as it would have been with someone with whom we had had long and intimate companionship. Everything, good or bad, humble or sublime, with which a human being is associated, has the power to root itself in the affections; and Prince had been an integral part of all our hardship and striving these past few arduous months.

The driver of our cab, convinced that we were miners who had struck a bonanza, lashed his thin nags up to the Arcadia Hotel — to us at that moment a most luxurious place — and then demanded a whole dollar, four times the regular tariff. The proprietor of the hotel, a worm-shaped, bilious, lazy Yankee, also divined that we had struck a bonanza, and signed us up for a room with bath at eight dollars a day, a fabulous price for Hermosillo and for us.

But that bath! We luxuriated in it all that first afternoon, laving ourselves again and again before going to bed.

IV

A civilized bed after many weeks in the open wilds is not always conducive to sleep or even repose. We had spent so many nights outdoors under the cool stars; here the four walls hemmed us in with the sultry air of a prison. On the desert we had slept on stones and gravel, yet sound as logs, never stirring until instinct warned us that the morning star was topping the ridges. But now, on this soft, comfortable bed, I tossed about, finding no opiate against the heat, the tight walls, the muggy consciousness of neighbours.

Along about eleven o'clock we heard again the long surge of trombones, liquid silver in the night, haunting, passionate, wailing, crying out the inarticulate protest that has echoed

down futile centuries in this betrayed, bleeding land. Far into the night under our balcony we heard the laughter and soft Spanish of this curious alien race; and, though the appurtenances of our room were American, I felt poignantly foreign, one who did not belong, one who never could belong to this bizarre land. And yet its very strangeness called to me and stirred me. The insistent, anomalous primitiveness that we had encountered everywhere in this country and in its people and their customs, though well glossed over with the artful graces of Spanish culture, lured me with its paradoxical mystery.

The hours rolled on, and still I lay tossing about, nervous, tense with the effort to fall asleep. I figured up our remaining capital — sixty-eight dollars and forty cents. That wouldn't carry us far at eight dollars a day. We'd have to find a more economical place and that soon. Thoughts of money recalled past difficulties: Querobabi, the station-agent, theft, the terrors of being left penniless in a foreign land among strange peoples. In my childhood I had been fed upon bogey stories of Mexican dishonesty and thieving, and now, hearing soft voices under the window, I suspiciously strained my ears to catch the conversation. Words here and there: "*Americanos, muy ricos* — very rich — miners — the desert — gold," something about "robbery" — a queer hodge-podge. Reality escaped me. Odd hallucinations galloped through my head. Strange unnamable fears assailed me. Kicking off my sheet, I tiptoed to the door and listened.

The hotel was quiet. Flinging on my clothes, I walked out. A typical Spanish-Arabic building with a large *patio* — flower-filled and enclosed by red arcades. A fountain plashed silver in the moonlight. Not another soul was about — only the ghosts with which I peopled the shadow-patterned arcades. I was alone in this Moorish *patio*. I — and out there beyond the quadrangle — Mexico — the world — the rest

of the universe — eternity — creation — all the inscrutable problems of life.

For a long time I remained there in the corner of the *patio*, staring at the murmuring fountain and the shadow and the sharp patch of moonlight on the carved sands and the queer refulgence of it upon the large, glossy magnolia leaves.

Presently I returned to bed, even more wakeful than before. The subtle life of the unknown city beyond the encircling walls still clamoured in my overwrought imagination. — I drowsed. — Voices again — under our balcony. — I seemed to catch startling words — probably the shades of my disturbed fancies, but no less real:

“We shall rob the rich Americans. The desk clerk is our friend. He will slip us the key, yet pretend not to see us. We shall creep along the empty, tiled corridor, stealthily open the door, and stab the rich Americans, who have come with gold from the desert.”

A dream, an hallucination, the reflex of our trying experiences of the past few weeks, a distorted fancy? All I know is that these words were real to me, real as the cold bedposts I clutched so tensely.

Wide awake, heart beating, every sense alert, I lay there straining my ears. Again I pulled on my trousers. I felt for the money belt in which we kept our scant capital, and on an impulse shoved the money under the edge of the matting. Such a pitiful amount to be concerned over! Yet at that moment I could not conceive of life without it — especially here in Mexico.

Many long, quivering moments passed while I sat on the edge of the bed, oppressed with nervous apprehension. Every creak of the cooling wooden beams above my head, the drip of water in the bath-room, were starkly fear-inspiring to one awake in the dead of night. Finally I went back to bed, but

could find no peace and remained staring at the beamed ceiling, on which flickered the unsteady shadows from an arc-lamp in the street.

The voices ceased. Feet padded away softly. Quiet fell over the town, disturbed only by the occasional baying of dogs and the muezzin call of roosters, reassuring each other over long distances. Now and then *huaraches* (sandals) shuffled along the sidewalk just outside, and fantastic fears took new shapes to torment me. I lay stiff, listening for sounds in the corridor.

Once I heard footsteps. They seemed to halt at our door, and my muscles stiffened. But whoever was there went on to ascend the stairs at the end of the corridor. Again I breathed more easily, but waited, expecting to hear others, to hear soft whisperings, to see the gentle opening of the door. And ghostly steps I did hear, and phantoms I saw in the corner of the room.

At what hour I finally fell asleep I have no idea.

Suddenly a voice — far away. — It gathered volume. — My brother's voice:

"Come, wake up. It's late."

I jerked violently to my senses. The hot morning sun had cut a white, glaring angle on matting and tile.

V

The next two days we spent in delicious idleness, wandering around the town, sitting in the plaza, talking with fellow loafers, prowling down along the river-bottom.

Two days we lived thus at the Hotel Arcadia, luxuriously, improvidently, lazily, not daring to reckon up our fast-evaporating funds.

We decided to change to a cheaper hotel, the Hotel Juárez, where we could get a room with cots for fifty cen-

tavos a day — no bath. We checked out of the Arcadia and hailed a cab to take us over.

Arriving at the Juárez I dug into my pocket to pay the fare. No money!

I pawed through my pockets. Not a sign of our money. We had lost it. All our dire premonitions of the first night had, through sheer carelessness, come to pass. We stood there on the curb in front of the hotel, blankets on our backs, staring at each other stupidly. No money! Not a cent!

CHAPTER XIII

CAJEME

I

WE walked aimlessly up one street and down another. We came to the river on the south-west fringe of town by the river-bottom. Poor people squatted here in slovenly huts of stray pieces of board, flattened oil-cans, draped rags. Here too, in the large cottonwood-trees, were the homes of swarms of red-headed zopilotes — buzzards. Branch and ground were covered with white droppings.

We walked along an elevated bank, on one side the sand and gravel, on the other an orange grove, enclosed by a high wall. Beyond we found a dent in the bank near a break in the wall. We slumped down here on our blankets. We were hungry and tired.

We very much doubted whether we could get a job. Our Spanish was atrociously poor; we were badly dressed. Nevertheless we had to find something to do at once, or starve.

"There must be Americans here," said Ralph.

"You stay with the blankets and I'll see what I can scare up," I replied.

Under the hot sun I walked slowly back to town and turned in at the Arcadia Hotel. The Yankee owner was lounging in a wicker chair in the hotel lobby, a chair from which he never stirred all day long. Telling him of our plight, I inquired about work. As we had been his guests, I expected some sympathy, but he listened uninterestedly. "Work!

There ain't none," he drawled, staring out at the sizzling street. "I don't know what you can do." He stretched slowly; then lifted himself from his creaking chair. "Give 'm fifty cents," he ordered his Mexican desk clerk. He slouched on into the *patio*, adding over his shoulder: "Then tell him to get out."

I was tempted to pick up the coin that the clerk slid across the counter and fling it after the vanishing hotel-keeper. But the thought of Ralph stayed me. Humiliated, my throat choking with anger, I stuck the coin in my pocket and stalked out into the blazing sun.

I felt sickeningly weak and hungry. Our slim diet in the desert had impaired our vitality. The few days in the hotel, with its good meals, had been a godsend, restoring us somewhat, physically and mentally. But now it was that much harder to get back to the old life. I dragged my way into a Chinese grocery and bought rice, begged some empty tins for cooking purposes, and returned to our camp by the river.

My brother, not having bumped up against the calloused hotel-keeper, was overjoyed at the sight of food. He had been moping by himself, but now jumped up with a sudden burst of good spirits. We prepared to cook. No matches! I cursed my stupidity. To have to tramp back into town under the piercing noonday sun for matches — the gloating fates could have devised no more sadistic cruelty. But there was no help for it.

I plodded back along the river bank, the buzzards croaking hoarsely above me, on through the sweltering streets to buy matches to cook rice. Once more I plodded out to camp — angled streets, sizzling sun, river bank, croaking zopilotes.

Firewood still had to be gathered. A task, for the camping Indians had gleaned every splinter for miles around. Ralph shinnied up a eucalyptus tree to pull off the scaling bark, long,

wide slabs of it; I crawled into the orange grove through the break in the wall and found some dead branches and a few wilted oranges. I also brought back a supply of orange leaves to boil for tea. Under the circumstances, not such a bad meal!

The next few days we lived wholly on rice and orange tea. My brother and I took turns cooking and scouring the town for a job. I asked for work at the flour-mills, at the hotels, at the orange ranches, everywhere, but I could find nothing. Americans would have nothing to do with a penniless compatriot; the Mexicans looked at us suspiciously, and our poor Spanish kept us from really understanding them. I tried the schools, hoping to teach English. But I was not dressed well enough. One store-keeper was tempted to give me a job, but as I was unable to understand some of his questions, he said: "Learn Spanish and come back."

Three days passed. Our rice was gone. We still had a watch and a Colt revolver, the latter slightly rusted during our trip, but still serviceable. I peddled these along the streets. An officer at the barracks gave me seven pesos for them.

More rice, some medicine for Ralph's eyes, which had become infected and were mattering badly, another meal — then we bundled up our blankets.

"Head back for the States?" I asked Ralph, "or go on?"

"Go on," he answered doggedly. "To the Río Yaqui."

At the railway ticket window I plunked down our entire capital. "Two third-class tickets south — as far as this will take us."

Two tickets stamped "Empalme" and twenty centavos change slid under the wicket.



A WAITING HIS MEAL

II

Our third-class coach was provided with backless benches cluttered with a motley crew of Indians, half-breeds, spewing, dirty children, squawking parrots, huge baskets of pottery and fruit — a *mélange* of scarlet sarapes, yellow and red shawls, bright, embroidered blouses, dusky faces, music, song, wails, and raucous sounds — a cascade of colour, life, noise, and promiscuity. The people were kindly but filthy. They soon befouled the floor with the stones from mangos, apricots, and mameys, and lubricated it with orange and banana peels, spilled liquids, and expectoration.

Two young fellows thrummed primitive guitars and chanted love-songs:

Quien se casa conmigo . . .

A Mexican officer appropriated a whole bench to himself and stretched out to sleep. The beautiful girl with whom he was travelling stood at the curtainless window for hours, taking the fierce southern sun on her back in order to shield his heavy animal-like features. Across from me sat a shoe-maker and his wife, bound for Guaymas — a neat, cleanly couple. She was a pretty, fragile woman with dazzling white teeth flashing from her nut-brown face, large eyes that opened with ingratiating surprise. He was such a gentle, round-faced, honest chap, with a philosophical turn to his simplest phrase — anyone with half an eye would have entrusted his shoes to him. Further down the car was a most miserable, revolting family, bedraggled, dirty, clad in rotten rags that scarcely clung to their unwashed bodies. The skinny, Indian father, face with pock-marks big as raisins, and four of the children were blind, their cheeks streaked with tears and grime. The

mother carried the smallest child, the only one with sight, in her arms. Its skin was a mass of open sores. A rancher, in an elaborate *charro* costume was flirting with a buxom Indian girl. She had wrapped her blue *tápalo* close about her plump cheeks and gazed out of the window to hide her pleased smiles. A drunken Spaniard, a tight, black *boina* on his head, was shouting salacious wit to the car.

For hours we bowled along a desolate, sun-baked, mountain-fringed country. Late that afternoon — the purple waters of Guaymas Bay, and Empalme. Just outside the station we spent our twenty centavos for several *tacos*, with chili, and coffee; then walked through the tree-shaded town. It was a bit of the United States set down in Mexico. As an administrative centre for the Southern Pacific Railway, Empalme boasted, for its homes, Los Angeles bungalows, planted in wide lawns, and tree-shaded streets, laid out in severe right angles. It looked prim and neat compared to Mexican cities, typically uniform and uninteresting, without the magic or mystery that is part and parcel of the Mexican town; but it touched a vibrant cord in us by its California atmosphere.

Night coming on, we spread our blankets under a tree in the field beyond the large, white hospital building. We rose before dawn. Our blankets were soaked with dew, and a chill wind was blowing in from the bay. Shivering, miserable, we stepped out upon the shore of El Pozo, the attractive inner harbour.

The east was aflame; the early flush of the oncoming sun played over the soft, phosphorescent cirrus clouds. The mountains on the opposite shore rose sheer out of the smooth, indigo water, which was broken here and there with streaks of silver where early fishing trawlers had lacerated the smooth surface. A delicate azure haze lay in bands over the water. Near at hand skimmed a little boat with a yellow,

triangular sail, its reflection clear-cut, perfect. Save for the occasional honk of wild geese from the marsh at our left, the morning was still and cool. As the day brightened, the purple of the mountains gradually turned to blue, to amethyst; the water became cobalt. A gold nimbus quivered on the mountain crests, slowly changing them to a muddy brown; and, as the sun leapt hot and red above the eastern horizon, to a raw terra-cotta. The crude, bare, harsh slopes rising from the greenish-blue waters accentuated the piercing beauty and calm loveliness of the landscape.

We turned back and cut down along the railroad from Empalme south-east toward the state of Culiacán — on toward the Río Yaqui, but not without much trepidation, for the country between Hermosillo and Gaymas had been terribly desolate. Our map showed the stations on south to be even more scattered. As soon as we turned our backs on the harbour and its hills, we faced the typical barren littoral of gravel and mesquit, sparse vegetation stretching in hot monotony across to the jagged, jejune Sierra Nevada, shimmering ochre in the hot morning haze.

Hardly had we gone a mile when the sole of my right shoe came loose and doubled up under my feet, or flapped up and down like the leather tongue of a termagant. I kept tying it in place, but the gravel and ties cut the cords almost immediately. I marched on, swinging my left foot vigorously at each step, bringing it down with a quick thump — a sort of ludicrous, one-legged goose-stepping — scarcely the thing for a successful cross-country.

We came upon a swarthy Mexican, a railway employé. "Where are you going?" he asked.

"On south."

He stared at us curiously from under the low, broad brim of his straw sombrero while he rolled a cigarette. "Can't be done. On south from here, all through the chaparral, Yaqui

Indians are as thick as flies on manure. They'll get you and hash you up into stew-meat. Don't try it. Don't try it!"

"But we hoofed it down from Hermosillo."

"That's nothing. That's not real Yaqui country. I tell you the Yaquis swarm all through here, clear back to yonder mountains. Sure death. Don't try it."

We sat down on a stack of tarred ties. Ahead of us stretched the bare, hot country — forlorn, empty, desiccated. Already, though the sun was still young in the sky, the sweat was rolling down our faces; our skulls ached with the dazzle of light; our bodies sagged with inertia. We had no canteens, no food, no burro to carry provisions. We were penniless. My shoes were out of whack. Never had we been quite so despairing about reaching our cache of gold.

We trekked forlornly back to Empalme, walked aimlessly up and down its prim streets, then hung around the railroad station. What now? Where now?

We sat on a bench in the waiting-room, blankets beside us, staring vacantly at the spit-stained walls. People were buying tickets for the passenger train due in twenty minutes. We sat; an American brakeman glanced in, saw us, hesitated, entered, looked swiftly about him, then hurriedly whispered: "There's a freight being made up back of the hospital. Crawl into the first empty and don't let anybody kick you off. Here's two bits for grub."

III

We surveyed the freight from the bushes. Grabbing our chance, we sneaked over and crawled into a box car. We slid the doors nearly to and sat at one end, out of sight of passers-by. Some fifteen minutes; then the train pulled out with a series of shudders and jolts. We slapped each other on the back and scoffed at ourselves for greenhorns ever to have

walked miles in the sun when a free train ride could be had.

Hour after hour of jolting! Late that afternoon we reached Esperanza, a thriving Indian town of adobe stores and thatched-roof cabins on the Río Yaqui. We stared at the strange place. We stared at the grim mountains. Somewhere to the north, up in those mountains, in the narrow gorge of the river, was the pay dirt we had heard about.

The clamour of the station crowds reclaimed our attention. The platform was cluttered with dark-faced Indians in white "pyjamas" and tall, peaked sombreros. Beyond were the queer, wattle-woven, thatched cabins. The town was singularly different from anything we had seen thus far — unique. Places like Hermosillo and Empalme, though alien, had a cosmopolitan touch. One occasionally did encounter Americans and Europeans. But here we knew we should meet Indians and a few Indianized mestizos — no one else. How could we manage to survive in a place so strange, so bizarre, unlike anything we had ever imagined in Western civilization, a *milieu* æons away from anything American? How should we get enough food to take us up into the mountains? And those grim mountains we now knew to be infested with savage Yaqui Indians. Would it not be better to go on to some place where we should have more of a chance of earning a little money, and thus assuring ourselves of proper equipment?

"Let Fate decide!" decreed Ralph. "Ride on till they kick us off."

Calling to one of the venders swarming on the platform, we invested our twenty-five centavos in *tacos* and oranges — our first food that day. Our purchases attracted a number of urchins, who came up all agog to the door of the box car to stare and question.

Before we knew it, the train conductor came swinging

along — a slim, sullen-faced half-breed. "What you doing here?" he demanded surlily. "Get out!"

We protested. In the midst of our loud confab, the plump, natty officer of the military escort — every train going through Yaqui country carried large contingents of soldiers — came up and listened to us with a broad grin.

"Aw, let 'em ride," he interpolated condescendingly.

The conductor scowled bumptiously. "It's dead against the rules."

"To hell with the rules."

"They can't ride ——"

The captain lost his temper. "Get along with you. I say they are going to ride." And he gave the conductor a hearty shove down the embankment. "That's that!" Turning to us: "You can ride here or with my men on top of the train."

"Here in the box car, I guess ——"

But at the next stop — Cajeme — our box car was side-tracked and the military escort taken off. Spying an empty stock car, floor covered with clean straw, we climbed in.

The conductor paid no attention to us. We congratulated ourselves on being left in peace.

But as soon as the train started, the conductor jumped into the car. "Get out," he bawled at us.

We refused to budge. He came menacingly toward us. I stood up. He made no attempt to put his hands on me; instead whistled shrilly. Two train hands came up on the run and flung themselves into the moving car.

"Throw 'em out!" ordered the conductor.

Reluctantly we hitched our blankets over our shoulders and swung off the rapidly accelerating train. A string of oaths in Spanish and pidgin-English whipped after us.

IV

Cajeme! A bizarre, yellow station, a handful of adobe huts, a general store, a military warehouse, and barracks — all set pitifully in the centre of a wide, hot, treeless llano. To the east rose the jagged sierras, to the west, far across the plain, dense, tropic vegetation massed in the low banks of the Río Yaqui.

In front of the barracks, the officer, our erstwhile protector, was dismissing his company of soldiers, ragtail in their faded, whitish uniforms, ravelled leggings, and beggarly shoes. A bugler, red braid dangling from his sleeves, blew a shrill blast that splintered in the middle. The soldiers broke ranks and sauntered away. I approached our protector.

He grinned. "Hello! Thrown off?"

"What can we do here?" I asked, sweeping my arm about helplessly.

"See Schneider at the Casa Grande!" He gestured toward the store, called the "Big House" because it was half a head taller than the others. "He'll take care of you. *Es muy buena gente* — he is a very good person."

We tightened our belts over our empty stomachs and walked across the barren space to the Casa Grande. Here an irascible German-American with a red, choleric face, gimlet, blue eyes and prominent paunch, painstakingly looked us over from head to foot.

"Come in on the train?" he asked. "Where from?"

"Empalme."

"Pay your fare or bum?"

"We bummed. In a box car. They kicked us off here."

"Got any money?"

"Not a cent."

"Neither have I." He turned his back on us to call out to

a man riding up at a wild gallop, who pulled his horse in so sharply that its front hoofs slid stiff under the hitching-bar in front of the store. The new-comer greeted Schneider effusively and the two talked and joked.

Soldiers and Indians — slender legs, heavy torsos, bold, bronze features, coarse, black hair, hot, velvet eyes — came up to the counter to buy sugar, calico, candles, trinkets. A girl in a long dust-sweeping skirt ground corn in a little red coffee-mill at one corner of the building. We stared out despondently from under the shade-giving *ramada* of the store at the forlorn settlement, the barracks, the ugly yellow station, across the empty llano towards the grim mountains, hazy with dancing heat. A little eddy of acrid dust whirled over us blindingly, causing us to gasp and cough.

Schneider turned to us again.

"There's a haystack inside to sleep on. Twice a day you can cook up a batch of rice with sausage for me and Joe" — he motioned with his hand toward a young clerk behind the counter — "and yourselves. When you're ready you can move on. We'll talk about that later on."

He said this in such a curt, matter-of-fact way that thanks seemed out of place. We mumbled something and went inside the corral behind his store. The blank despair which had enveloped us when we had slid off the train into this inhospitable, deserted little town evaporated. The very curtness of our host buoyed up our hopes and good spirits.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BATTLE IN THE JUNGLE

I

LATER that day Schneider told us morosely we oughtn't to have come around so soon, too early for harvest work, but that we might find something to do on Mr. Boyd's place, one of the large *haciendas* about twenty-five miles west, toward the coast near the Río Yaqui. Boyd was an American. "Something of a skunk," added Schneider, "but one can't always be chooser."

One of Boyd's teamsters would soon be in Cajeme with a load of flour, and we could ride out, thus saving ourselves a long, hot walk. Until then we could enjoy Schneider's hospitality.

Two days later Goyo, a towering hang-tongue, squint-eyed Nahua Indian, lashed six sweating mules up to the station platform.

We not only got the promise of a ride out to Boyd's ranch, but Goyo paid us fifty centavos each for unloading the wagon. While we worked, he sat on a barrel in the shade with insulting leisureliness, repairing the buckskin lash on his whip — and rearranging the red-embroidered sash about his powerful hips. He was tickled to death to oversee two white men.

The following morning we piled into his rickety wagon. The long lash whistled over our heads, and we rattled out of Cajeme in a cloud of dust amid canine "Vivas." Six mules

can travel. The hang-tongue Goyo made them travel. There was no *mañana* in his make-up. He alternated frantically between the ground and the wagon tongue. When on the wagon, he pleaded, whistled, yelled; when on the ground, he raced hard, lashing the leaders, who swerved madly toward the road ditch. The empty wagon thundered over the deep ruts. We were bumped, jounced, joggled, churned. In about fifteen minutes I developed such acute seasickness that I lost my lunch over the side of the wagon.

We left the open llano and plunged into the dense tropical vegetation toward the coast. The road became narrower and rougher. Dangerous, flailing branches stung and cut our faces. With every mile the trees and vines became more flamboyant. Long scarlet streamers and purple clouds of swinging sword orchids festooned the lofty branches. Yellow gourds glistened in the topmost peaks of the crushed-together palms, Brazil and rosewood, myrtles, oaks, and *guayacanes*. Close-woven blankets of lianas and other climbers flung their arms from branch to branch in riotous display of red and orange and magenta flowers. Captive female cedars, mournfully drooping, with long strands of weeping moss, were guarded by abnormal, crouching cactus growths. A ghostly vapour rose from the teeming, black soil, from the flesh-leaved plants, from every dank stem — a powerful, perfume that swept over the senses in serried waves of sickening heat. Garish birds of deepest crimson, of yellow, of bottle-green, screamed from the mysterious, poisonous depths. From a marsh, sky-line herons flashed through the air. In the imperial distance, framed by shifting cactus arms — the profile of purple-tinted mountains. In one of the larger irrigation ditches — Indian women, rubbing clothes or bathing, their long, wet hair streaming down over their voluptuous breasts. Strips of silver water broke the glistening green acres of corn and rice. Trumpet jasmine and madre-

selva smothered the thatched huts, thickly set among neat gardens and lanes walled with saguaro cactus and paloverde. In the doorways hung long strips of scarlet peppers and onions. Black-eyed *niños*, usually stark naked, occasionally in tattered trousers, or dust-gathering, hand-me-down skirts, stared at us incredulously.

We rattled over a low bridge, past a flour-mill, to the gate of the Hacienda Carmen and the Granje. We inquired about work. The young Swedish-American superintendent ran his slender, freckled hands meditatively through his blond, spiky hair and focused his vague blue eyes upon distant space.

"Yas, I take you on yust now. But you gotta wait and see what Boyd, he say. He away for two, three days. You see dat fellow vat pull weeds out from the irrigation ditch. You see him? Vall, yust you go do the same work. Fify centavos a day. First you go down to the cook. Yust tell him give you someding to eat."

II

We crossed the bridge over the irrigation ditch, past a pile of rusting machinery parts, along a trellised garden fence to the Casa Principal; on one side of it was a sleeping porch, on the other the mess-room.

We surprised the Chinese cook with his arm around a fat, dowdy Mexican woman whom we later learned was Boyd's native wife.

Fortified with some cold meat, burnt rice, and weak coffee, we came back to the irrigation ditch. We stared doubtfully at the muddy, sluggish water; then stripped off our trousers and rolled up our under-drawers. Gingerly I stuck my toe into the water, but jerked it back with an exclamation. The water, heated by the boiling sun, was scalding. But bit by bit we accustomed our skin to the heat and were soon up to the waist, hacking away at the weeds with our curved machetes.

The terrific sun hammered on our heads. The hot water of the stagnant irrigation ditch scalded our legs, and the glare from its surface and from the sheet-iron buildings cut into our throbbing eyes. A humid, fetid exhalation from decaying vegetable matter stifled me, and a swarm of gnats drifted about my face. Listlessly I hacked at the tough stalk of a reddish weed and hauled it forth, dripping with scum and long aquatic filaments.

Lack of food during the last few weeks, the terrible heat, the nerve-racking shimmer of the water on all sides — combined to sap our strength. Wielding a machete was like lifting the Woolworth Building itself. Exhausted, I straightened up my aching back to stare across the far-flung, flooded rice-fields of the Hacienda Carmen, shimmering silver for miles, to the distant jungles of the Yaqui River. To my right, beyond a staggering wire fence, were huddled the houses of the Granje. The Casa Principal was a large, adobe structure set in a scraggly vegetable garden and overshadowed by a giant *ahuehuate* tree. It faced the gaunt, three-story rice-mill, whose galvanized roof smote my eyes so dazzlingly. Near by stood the mess-room, bunk-house, warehouses, auto shed; further on, the corrals for the cows, horses, and pigs. From across the road came the low drum of the flour-mill. A workman, hoary with flour, passed from it into the general store, returning shortly with a package of Primores cigarettes, one of which he offered me as he passed by.

Lighting it, I stared down the dreary, heat-dancing road that dwindled away among the rice-fields. The store-keeper's daughter, a red jar of water on her head, lazily crossed the road. She was broad-hipped, voluptuous, dirty, brazenly flirtatious. A few rods away was camped a company of soldiers to protect the *hacienda* from the raids of savage Yaqui Indians. These soldiers were a ragged crew. They drowsed all day under low, palm-roofed *ramadas*, playing cards for

cartridges or squatting around the cooking-fires at twilight. Full in the glare of the merciless, lowland sun, unprotected by any covering, their dirty women ground corn into masa with stones, or stooped over tin braziers to cook *tortillas* and *chile con carne*.

The Mexican soldier is accompanied everywhere by his wife, his "Juana." She follows him on forced marches, rides on the windy, swaying tops of military trains, carries his burdens, shares his hours of forced bivouacs, brings ammunition and water to him on the battle line; in the midst of sharp firing urinates on the barrel of his gun to cool it off so that he can keep on firing. Instances have been known of parturient Juanas who have dropped behind on the line of march to give birth to children. The new-born is wrapped in the *rebozo*, or shawl, and the mother then hurries on to catch up with the detachment.

Sullenly I spit on my hands and took up my machete again. By sundown we had cleared a fair stretch. The weeds that we had flung out upon the bank were already dry and brittle. We crawled out of the water, sloughed the mud from our legs, and doused our sweating, red faces. We tried to pull on our trousers. Torture of tortures! We gritted our teeth and worked them on inch by inch. Even so the cloth rasped our raw, red skin. Every step became an agony. We sidled across the yard, past heaps of rusting machinery, as though we were walking on eggs.

At the mess-room we squeezed in at the long wooden table among the other hands, some thirty odd. The day's labour left us too listless and apathetic to eat the coarse food: rice, soggy potatoes, pork, sour bread. We dabbed at things finically.

To my right a Saxon-haired Texan, named Wad Watson, was shovelling huge forkfuls into his mouth and talking to me at the same time, so that his speech was like the bubbling

of mush. He told us how rotten the food was that he was gulping down in such quantities and what a "lousy, shrivelled skinflint" Boyd, the owner, was — "a dirt-eating bastard."

After supper he led the way to the bunk-house. As it was full up, he suggested we sleep in the rice-mill. This lean, sheet-iron structure, cluttered with machinery, pulleys, and long chutes, was open on one side.

"But the mosquitoes?" I asked, for I was slapping at them constantly. "They'd eat us alive. They're big as beetles."

"And they've teeth like saws," added Wad. "But some of the other boys sleep there. Try the third floor. They don't fly that high."

We followed his advice. But that night a strong wind was blowing and it lifted the pests clear to the third story and deposited them there. They buzzed about us all night, sinking their sharp stingers into us without respite. I lay huddled by the edge of a wide-open ladder hole, my brother by the open outer edge of the mill; these being the only places not taken up by the chutes, apparatus, or other sleepers. My brother wedged his feet under one of the rice-cleaning machines, satisfying me that, if he did fall, he would be caught by his feet and only break a leg or two. Several times through the night I woke, sweating from a nightmare of fear, in which I had been falling from a precipice. The mosquitoes, our raw, cooked skin, the danger of rolling off in our sleep, the sweltering air — Faust himself never passed a more delirious night.

For three days we pulled weeds from the irrigation ditch. Our skin, blistered on the first day, became water-soaked and whitish. By night our fingers would be wrinkled and clammy; in the morning, dry and cracked. We developed several ugly-looking sores that refused to heal.

III

We made acquaintances. The smithy and rice-mill were in charge of one William, a thin, languid, blond German who dragged about *dissecta membra*, like a jumping jack without a motivating string. Nevertheless he was a conscientious, able workman and shaped anything out of crude iron bars: hooks, tools, cable sockets. At need he turned barber, contributing to the self-sufficiency of the *hacienda* by cutting the hair of the peons Sunday mornings. He did his hair-cutting for charity, though not averse to compensation, especially eggs of any fowl. "I was *hier gekommen, Sie wissen* —" and he would go on in German-Spanish-English polyglot, "to save myself from dying of tuberculosis." William found difficulty in conversing. Every language, even his own, came laboriously to his tongue. The suave Spanish he turned into the gurgling noise of an emptying bottle. His English chopped at me like a blunt delicatessen knife; his mere attempt at it usually sent him into paroxysms of coughing. His own German — hopelessly corrupted — was like the caress of a porcupine. If his first word in any language was not immediately understood, he gestured hopelessly, hitched up his white duck trousers, and relapsed into dejected, melancholy silence, which no importunity could break. At times William's polyglot became highly amusing. The second day after our arrival, he burst wildly out of the smithy waving red-hot tongs and shouting: "Der caballo ist im garten gechumped and on dose cabages gevalked" — an Esperantoism for "The horse has jumped into the garden and trampled on the cabbages."

The foreman of the rice-fields, Rufo Draco, was a massive, fierce-jawed mestizo, with red, pig eyes above high cheek-bones — a morose, brutish animal. His flat nostrils, set

in a wide face, puffed out over fleshy lips — a wrinkled lecherous mouth. He stalked about the place like a rumbling tornado. Occasionally he took a glowering look at our work, grunted, swore, and stumped off.

The fourth day we had been on the ranch he ordered Ralph and me to follow him out to repair an irrigation dike. He led the way through the sweltering rice-fields, looking at us occasionally in a most malignant manner. Without warning he suddenly swung his gorilla arms and clawing fingers into my face with a snarl. "See these hands!"

I backed off precipitately.

"I never fight with revolver or knife." He tapped these instruments at his side, gloating at my dismay. "With these two hands I fight, and no man crosses Rufo Draco's path."

We strode between two rows of osiers. He chewed his tough lips; then exploded: "I was born here on this *hacienda*, before Señor Boyd came. My mother was a beautiful Yaqui. At fifteen she married a peon here. The owner, a Spaniard, a Gachupín, caught sight of her one day when he was riding among the out-huts. The next day her man was yanked away by the rurales — the police of Díaz, you know — on a conscription order. After several months that Spanish beast, that *cabrón de Gachupín*, threw her out among the pigs. I was her kid, his son. I ran wild here till put to work pulling weeds out of the ditches — like you've been doing. I was ten years old then. All day under the sun I worked. All day and ten years old," he repeated, twisting his leathery face into a seamed sneer.

We turned down a low, dirt dike. The rice-fields stretched for miles on either side of us. I cogitated silently on his bitter tale. My Anglo-Saxon indifference aroused his fury. Again he thrust his paws into my face. I almost stepped off into the ditch.

"I was eighteen when I got my first flogging," he went on hoarsely. "Floggings are necessary, but I was flogged unjustly. Two men were let loose on me with rawhide. But I worked my hands free and flung them both aside. I got that Gachupín, my father, by the throat until he strangled."

He put his hands to his own throat and made a gurgling sound. His black eyes flashed like powder-pans.

"I hid out for two years in the mountains near the sea. I had a little cabin up in the rocks, and I lived on sea food and eels and animals. Sometimes I sneaked up country lanes and stole live-stock or robbed someone. I left more than one dead man behind me."

He laughed harshly. "You like the story, eh? Every night I stood on the cliff by the sea, the wind and spray in my teeth, and cursed the human race." Again he let loose his jangling laugh. "Since that day Rufo Draco has had no pity in his heart, no pity." He leaned down and cut off a thick stalk with his knife; then broke it like a tiny twig in his powerful fingers. "I break men like I break this wood."

He grabbed my arm. The pain of his claw-like grasp shot up into my shoulder. "If it pleased me, I could snap your bones in the same way."

He flung my arm loose, chuckling diabolically. "Since the day I choked that Gachupín no man has played loose with Rufo Draco." He relapsed into glum silence.

Suddenly he exploded: "Walk up and down these dikes. See whether they need fixing. If they do, fix them." He turned brusquely on his heel and strode away.

Later I talked with the young Swede, who, I noticed, kept out of Rufo's path as much as possible. "Isn't it dangerous to have such a man about?" I asked.

"I tank so. Yet it bane bad be widout such man," he replied, shrugging.

And he told me how in Esperanza several months ago he

had witnessed a gun fight between the constable and town judge. The constable, being the more sober, arrested the judge for drunkenness. The judge demanded to know how he should try himself. The constable replied that he could not be released until tried, and he couldn't be tried until released, and so would have to stay in the calaboose all his life. In these parts, the Swede told me, nothing can be done through legal channels except with much bribery and delay. "All the neighbours bane 'fraid from Rufo and meddle not mid us."

IV

An incident the day after Boyd returned — the day we had been set to work on the dikes — revealed to us just how Rufo made himself useful to the ranch. Boyd was a lean, Mexicanized, wry-mouthed, vicious-looking, ex-Texas ranger, desiccated, penurious, a completely brutalized miser, hated by everyone. The Espirón people, neighbors further up the river, believing he was still away, cut off the ranch's entire water supply. Had Boyd gone to court to seek redress, thousands of acres of rice would have withered while he looked for a sober and unarrested judge. As it was, his decision was instantaneous.

"Cut the water back into our ditches," he told Rufo.

Rufo, at the head of a big gang in which I was drafted (Ralph had gone to work in the warehouse), went off singing and shouting curses at the Espirón people, hoping with all his soul for a fight. Our picks and shovels flew, scattering the dirt and stones. In half an hour we had the offending dikes cut; the water swirled into the fields; the rice-crop was saved. Old Rufo bulked above his handiwork on the main irrigation ditch, his face aflame with victory, his feet spread out across an open side gate like some squat Colossus of Rhodes.

That afternoon Rufo meted out primitive justice — two eyes for one and a whole jaw-bone for a tooth — by having us destroy the enemy ditches, thus openly courting conflict. The Mexicans beside me grumbled and glanced about apprehensively, expecting an attack. While we were working, a tropic, afternoon thunder-shower burst across the jungle, wrapping tree and field in its impenetrable mantle of gray. Hardly had it commenced when a shout went up.

“The Espirón people!” cried the man by my side, and pulled me down behind a bank.

We crouched there, waiting. The new-comers, however, did not molest us, but contented themselves with repairing the damage we had made. The boss of the new gang and Rufo shouted nasty epithets at each other. Rufo ordered us to work again, and we continued breaking down the wall of the ditches. The other group kept repairing the damage we had done.

Suddenly a heavy rock whizzed past Rufo and whanged against a tree-trunk. Some more altercation, and before we knew it we were in a free-for-all — a wild *mêlée* of cursing and flying missiles and deadly pick and shovel handles. Sombreros bobbed furiously. Knives flashed. Tool clanged on tool. A writhing mass of bodies reeled up and down the slippery irrigation slopes in the driving rain. Shouts echoed the thunder. A huge fellow aimed a terrific blow at me with a pick handle. I parried it with my spade and ducked. A heavy clod struck me on the head, and dirt flew into my mouth and eyes. Stunned, I rolled down the ditch into the muddy water. I spluttered and kicked and slid about the opposite side. My body was smeared with mud from head to foot; my clothes were dripping. All the fight was gone out of me.

Fortunately our men were pressing the others back. Hardly had I gained the bank when the Espirón workers took to their heels in full flight across the flooded fields. Ex-

ultantly we broke up a few more yards of embankment and returned to the Granje.

The next day Rufo went off alone to the Espirón *hacienda*, rifle across his pommel, a wicked-looking knife in his broad, red sash. He may not have fought with these weapons, but he came back smiling, jingling many coins in his pocket. That afternoon and thereafter all parties had water.

CHAPTER XV

THE STORM

I

As though in mockery of this petty human altercation, Nature capriciously decided to supply this precious water in unlimited quantity. The dry season was approaching, but apparently she wanted a last fling. For several days we had noticed a strange, electrical quickening in the atmosphere. As soon as the sun vanished, the air turned chilly. Late afternoons stray clouds scudded across the horizon; nights — the hungry cry of coyotes down from the hills. One twilight a long tilde-shaped flock of geese spread out, black as gnomes against the molten west. In the stables and corrals the horses were as touchy as at mating time.

A swirl of yellow dust in the dying gray whirled up, growing darker and darker, until the very nostrils tingled. Night hurtled over the sky on the wings of black clouds. A few sharp gusts bent the trees to the ground, then let them jerk back with shuddering branches. The huge *ahuehuete* in front of the house threatened to snap. It reeled like a mast in a storm at sea, and its branches cracked like loose yards. Then a dread, breathless, heart-pinching calm, a few stray drops, a freshening of wind until the trees tossed like furies with writhing hair, and at last, in blinding flashes of lightning amidst the long stamp of thunder, the heavens burst apart. The rain whistled through the trees; it flailed the roofs and pounded white foam upon the ground. Its icy chill crept through the marrow of our bones.

For three days and three nights the wind screamed overhead; for three days and three nights the outbuildings were blotted from sight, and even the lightning was visible only as an unearthly yellow glow. Only once or twice did the rain ease up, and on these occasions, with gunny sacks over our heads, we slopped back and forth with hay and grain for the hungry animals.

Nor was our position in the rice-mill bearable. The very first night the roof began to leak. With a shift of wind, the rain drove in the open side across the floor in blinding sheets. We tumbled down to the second landing, but the water accumulated in pools that soon broke and ran over toward the rear walls. We were driven out. We slipped and slid down the steel ladder to the ground floor. The lightning snapped through the sky, giving us weird glimpses of the machinery and sheet-iron walls. There on the ground-floor, drenched, freezing, we found some slight protection from the howling wind and racing storm. Heaps of sawdust provided us with a dry place to sleep. But soon these heaps became islands. The water crept up and up, steadily eating into them. Little by little they melted away. Suddenly I slid off into the water — an ugly, muggy, cold bath. Shivering we dashed out into the black storm. It howled over our heads; it ripped at us, whirled us about, smashed our faces. We fought our way through the fast-rising flood to the bunk-house. But every bunk was filled, and the floor two feet under water. A storm of curses greeted us as we wrenched open the door. We battled against the raging wind to close it again. Almost swept off our feet, we beat our way back to the rice-mill.

“The lean-to!” shouted Ralph.

This was the shed where sacked rice was kept. We struggled to the door. Locked!

“The window!”

We fought our way around the corner in the teeth of the

gale, clinging to the cold, sheet-iron surface, plumping our feet down into the swirling water. We pulled and yanked at the sash. But our hands slipped on the smooth, wet surface. The wind drove us back time and again.

"Here goes," I yelled, and smashed the glass in with my fist.

My hand dripping blood, I clambered and clawed my way through the narrow opening across the jagged points left in the putty. Once inside I gave a helping hand to Ralph.

We found an uncomfortable bed across sacks of rice. Soon eight other men followed on our scent and tumbled in through the opening. Dripping and shivering, we piled together like pigs, feet and bodies intertwined, as far as we could get from the open window, through which the rain and wind whistled like ten thousand demons.

II

On the third night of the storm, Boyd asked me to sleep in the parlour at the outside door of the house to guard that the rising water from the yard did not enter. If need arose, I was to rout out some of the men and set them to work diking up sandbags.

For a time Boyd, his wife, Margarita, her cousin Toño, and her child, Jacinto, sat about the parlor. Boyd bunched there, thin, gray, wry-faced, like some gaunt prehistoric bird. Toño was a gay rascal in tight trousers with "chaps," a silver-braided sombrero, and a green kerchief about his neck. He flirted with Margarita by means of warm glances and stealthy hand pressures. Years ago she must have been a beauty, but time and Boyd's brutality had ravaged face and body. Now she was a fat, greasy, over-sexed creature with heavy lascivious lips. Even so she still had some flicker of

charm — a certain brittle shine, like the silver handles on a coffin. When she peered out into the storm, her black eyes flickered brilliantly, almost hungrily. Her child Jacinto clung to her side, timid, pale, a snivelling little wretch.

While they were talking, How Sing, the cook, brought in a large brazier with a ridiculous smoke-stack centre. The group huddled around, blinking at the glitter of the polished surface. Boyd resurrected a bottle of mescal and poured out a thimbleful each, surlily offering me some also. It had a disagreeable after-taste of coal-oil and copper, but it stimulated Margarita's tongue. With a lowering of eyelids for Toño and a twitch of her shoulders for How Sing, she remarked that to-night the old witch who lived up in the grotto in the coast hills must surely be out riding the storm. This witch, she related, was a soothsayer and a layer-on of hands — a combination of *bruja* and *curandera* (witch and healer).

"When you're ill, you must send her a piece of nail or a lock of hair, and she'll utter her incantations and later on advise you how to cure yourself. If you're very ill, she'll rub you all over with an egg, give you a bath in a *temascal*, and you'll get well. She has made many miraculous cures. My cousin, Toño," she continued, "can tell you so himself. He visited her to get rid of the warts on his hands. She promised to make them go away, but first she made him give up all his finery: sombrero jacket, silver braid and all, yes, even his red under-shirt; said Christ never wore red under-shirts, so why should he? Oh, she's a holy one! Toño came back to the ranch after dark, a chastened soul. You are a chastened soul, aren't you, Toño?"

"And have his warts disappeared?" I ventured to ask.

"Did they, Toño?" asked Margarita, laughing.

Toño held out his hands. "All but this one."

A blast of the storm jarred the windows; the rain hammered. We looked up, startled.

"Come on to bed," growled Boyd and stalked off.

"Good-night, sweet cousin," said Margarita, and her smirking glance took in me as well as Toño and How Sing, who had come in for the brazier.

I lay down before the outer door on a straw-woven *petate*. Outside I could hear the wind souging in the *ahuehuete* tree and the drive of the rain against the door. But I fell asleep almost immediately and dreamed that a huge spider with Margarita's face was crawling over me. I woke with a scream that synchronized with a tremendous crash. The house rocked. The storm hammered and shook the door. I jumped up, stumbling over a hard-cornered object. Holding my left shin and muttering sulphurous words, I danced around in the dark.

Boyd came dashing down with a candle, suspenders dangling. Of all the confused events that followed, I remember most distinctly how the light shone waxily through his thin, dry skin and lit up his sallow, shrivelled features.

"What's happened?" Without waiting for my reply, he bolted on out into the rain, leaving me to close the door. I struggled helplessly with the latch. A broken waterspout spurted an icy stream down my neck; a blast wrenched the door from my grasp. It crashed inwards, sending a roar through the entire house. I got it shut at last and splashed after Boyd. We bumped into Rufo, dripping and waterlogged.

"Don Jacinto!" shouted the major-domo above the roar of the storm. "His room, the corner room is gone."

"GONE!"

A flash of lightning! A colossal black wall blocked our path. A fallen tree with huge branches writhing in the air. The lofty *ahuehuete* fronting the house had crashed through the corner room where Jacinto slept.

"The sheet-iron roof from the rice-mill," yelled Rufo.

'It was jerked loose and driven like a knife through the trunk.'

We dashed back into the house, like crazy men, up the stairs, down the dark corridor to the opposite wing. Boyd — a live battering-ram — lunged through the door of Jacinto's room.

The black edge of the world! The wall gone! The rain slopping in our faces! The wind screaming! The thunder smashing and breaking in our ears! A flash!

Jacinto's bed — uninjured, but empty!

We clung there, three midgets before the inky pit of nothingness, stooping against the drive of wind and rain. We struggled back to the door as on a slippery careening deck, with one accord tore downstairs.

On the lower floor How Sing had lit candles.

"In the kitchen —" I heard him say.

We dashed through the intervening door. There Margarita was bathing Jacinto in a steaming tub.

III

Morning again! Clear and hot — hot — hot — a steaming world, coated with ugly yellow water three feet deep.

I waved to Rufo, who had just leapt from the house stoop, landing squarely and heavily on the back of his sleek pony. He went off, chuck, chuck, chucking through the flood.

The tractor looked like Fulton's first steamboat. William, the blacksmith, was perched disconsolately on the boiler. As though it were a holiday, he wore his white duck trousers; his pink suspenders glowed against his blue shirt.

The river had burst its banks. The lake had overflowed. Every irrigation ditch was a racing torrent. The whole country-side was covered with this yellow sheet of water, which was steadily rising. I kicked off my shoes and rolled my

trousers to the crotch. We clambered over the giant *ahuehuete* like Lilliputians over the body of a Gulliver, and swashed through the slimy flood. My feet were cut a dozen times by bones, tin cans, sharp pieces of iron. The peons were in a terrible plight. The flood had washed into their floorless *jacales*; some of the adobe walls had melted away. In the hut of Goyo, the teamster who had originally brought us out from Cajeme, a sewing-machine rocked on top of the table, and on its edge, as on a juggler's nose, balanced all the family provisions. Underneath on the floor lay an indescribable mass of soaked rags, sticks, pictures, and household utensils.

Rufo waded up, swinging his long arms. "Water's rising fast."

Boyd snapped out orders. "Rout everybody out. Cut the dikes between here and the jungle."

"Thirty-five acres of rice."

"Have to go. Open a flow off through the jungle to the river." And he swashed back into the house.

Rufo ordered us out to the fields. I plunged along the oozy bottom, fighting for a footing. My feet sank and stuck. My arms flailed about helplessly. Every step was an exhausting effort. By the time I reached the scene of operations, I was sweating like a pig, and the terrible, humid heat had robbed me of most of my strength.

Up to my waist in water, I set to work hacking and shoveling at the loose, mud dikes which paralleled each other at about fifteen-yard intervals. These were cut away and the water swept through with an impetuosity that carried all before it, bringing a hundred struggling creatures, washed out from the jungle. Every uplifted tuft of vegetation harboured scorpions and centipedes, huge polychromatic snakes, eels and long, black worms, thick as a man's thumb, all avid for escape from the swirling water and frantically ready to scramble up the first human body encountered.

A slim reptile, blue as the barrel of a new rifle, wrapped itself around one peon's arm. He tore it away with a savage laugh. A little later another was stung on the finger by a black scorpion.

Rufo led him over to a tree. "Stick your hand against the trunk," he commanded and chopped the bitten finger off with a machete. He deftly made a cincture with a strip from his bandana handkerchief. The fellow stalked off the Granje with solemn indifference.

I edged along toward the end of a dike which curved behind some *charneca* trees. I was hacking away at the mud and weeds when suddenly my feet shot off into space. I plumped down into a deep spot with a gasp, sucking in a mouthful of nauseating, hot, muddy water. I bobbed up. The current swirled in my ears, the cobalt sky shimmered with a thousand glints of light. I struggled for a footing, but plunged down again. My feet caught in a tangle of grass which I could not kick loose. The grass moved slowly with the current; my body acted as a submarine sail. My head drummed and my heart contracted with fear. Again I snorted up. My head bumped an overhanging branch.

I flung out my hand, my nails dug at the slippery bark. Slowly, painfully, inch by inch, I pulled myself to safety and sprawled across the branch. For many minutes I clung there snorting and panting. Muddy water ran down my doused hair into my eyes and mouth. The sun beat upon me; the gnats buzzed in my ears.

The dikes were all cut when I got up enough nerve to return to the Granje.

CHAPTER XVI

KICKED OUT

I

EACH day, the mess-room food got poorer. The rice was burned or half cooked, the meat scorched, nothing savoury. The rumble of discontent among the hands grew louder each meal.

"The yellow Chink is watching Margarita instead of the pots," was the cynical password.

How Sing was abused every time he served the table. The noon after the storm, when most of us had been cutting dikes, this ill humour reached its climax. Wad, the Texan, threw his plate of half-cooked rice at How Sing, hitting him on the shoulder. The Chinaman scampered into the kitchen, followed by a gale of ugly shouts and laughter.

Boyd stormed into the mess-room. "What skunk threw that plate of rice?" he demanded, glaring malignantly down the table.

Wad stood up, smiling, arms akimbo.

"Clear out," snapped Boyd.

Wad grabbed his sombrero down from the wall with a flourish and went out, flinging a string of vile oaths over his shoulder at Boyd.

We were lounging in the bunk-house discussing the incident when Boyd came over to us.

"Anyone here know how to cook?" he demanded. "Three pesos a day."

Cooking looked better to me than pulling weeds out of an

irrigation ditch or shovelling mud, and three pesos seemed a fortune. I had once been a cook's helper, and the cooking here on the ranch was very primitive.

"Well, who wants the job?" demanded Boyd impatiently.

I was hesitant, but my brother urged me to try it.

Boyd straightway led me out with him to skin a calf. My utter ignorance of skinning calves was evident. Boyd regarded me doubtfully.

"You must be a damn' good cook if you don't even know how to skin a calf!" he growled.

Most of the cooking was done in five-gallon oil-cans — Boyd was too tight to buy utensils — on a neurasthenic stove that heated only in one small spot. I soon appreciated why How Sing had served us half-cooked rice one day and scorched rice the next. The nearer it came to meal-time, the worse the stove acted up. But fortunately, when throwing some peelings out the back door, I discovered that How Sing had supplemented the temperamental stove by provisional fire-boxes made of clay and iron cross-bars. I got a fire roaring in these, and, by dividing my rice up among the three cans, just managed to get it cooked on time, but it was soggy and the meat was scorched.

Just before I was ready to serve, Margarita brought in a can of chilies. At that time I was still unaware of the potency of chili and put the whole can into the meat. This burned the mouths of the men so sharply that it helped to hide the scorched flavour. The comments on my first meal were far from encouraging.

Margarita, clad in a dressing-gown, her bare feet in a pair of gaudy, worn bedroom slippers, had shuffled into the mess-house kitchen several times. Every time she came she invariably gave me a smirking smile and managed to stand close to me. But I was so intent on preparing the meal against so many handicaps that I hardly realized her presence. But

when I was cleaning up, she came in again, shuffled to the screen door, looked out carefully, then came to my side, her bronze flat features twisted into a sensual smile. Under the pretext of borrowing a knife, she touched my hand, then patted it.

"Do you think I am so bad looking?" she asked coyly.

I stared at her coarse black hair and lecherous lips, but assured her she was not at all bad looking.

An almost ghoulish light in her eyes, she ran her hand over my cheek. I endured it. Apparently sufficient encouragement, for she put her plump arm about my neck and commanded; "Kiss me."

My face was close to hers, and her heavy features filled me with sudden revulsion. I sent her spinning toward the door.

At the foot of the stairs she returned upon me, blazing. "You'll pay for this. You'll pay for this. Wait till I tell Boyd. You'll pay."

And with a hideous, triumphant laugh, she clattered up the creaking stairs.

I became alarmed. The more I thought about the incident, the more alarmed I became. I thought of skipping out immediately. But we were penniless, and the whole country-side was still under water. Besides to go would indicate some wrong-doing, and we wanted to get a few dollars together in order to head directly for that cache of gold up in the mountains on the Río Yaqui.

Margarita did not put her nose into the kitchen any more, and I prepared the evening meal without any supervision. —

Before dawn the next morning I waded across the yard toward the mess-room. A candle was already guttering in the kitchen. How Sing was sleepily sticking wood into the stove.

"Me cookie," he announced phlegmatically, looking at me through the slits of his eyes.

"Who said so?"

"Boyd, he slay so. You belly go. Bly and bly Boyd, he kill um." The Chinaman drew his hand across his throat to indicate my impending fate.

I didn't answer. As I had received no orders from Boyd, I began working alongside the Chinaman.

Margarita came down. Her face wore an ugly, yet triumphant, expression. She did not speak to either of us. I thought it far more likely that Margarita had made How Sing her confidant rather than her husband. Nevertheless I was apprehensive of what Boyd might do.

So while working I took the precaution to have a big knife close at hand, and stood sideways so as to watch the three doors. Not that I intended to fight Boyd; he was tall and wiry, too ugly a customer; but I did intend to protect myself if need arose.

About nine o'clock he put in an appearance. He stood at the threshold, watching us with a lowering stare. I pretended not to notice him, though my heart thumped away at a great rate.

He gave some orders to How Sing and then added in his dull, flat voice: "The Chink 'll do the cooking," and turned on his heel.

"And what shall I do?"

Without looking around, he halted, talking straight ahead. "Do? Why I guess you and your brother had better clear out. Better make it snappy too."

II

I dilly-dallied around, putting away pots, drying my hands, wiping off the tables. Then, when How Sing went into the mess-hall, I hurriedly stuffed my pockets and shirt full of matches, salt, and other cooking accessories.

Evidently Boyd had already informed Ralph, who was

not out working, but sitting in the rice-mill mending his shoes, which were pretty far gone.

I made a sortie into the store-room where we had slept the first night of the storm and filled a couple of cans with rice and beans and took about ten pounds of dried onions. With these supplies and the pittance coming to us we hoped to get quite a way. I replaced my shoes, which were now falling off my feet, and quite useless in the water, with a pair of *huaraches*, Indian sandals, which were hanging in the bunk-house.

Thus outfitted, our blankets over our shoulders, we went over to the house to ask Boyd for our wages.

He was sitting on a low rocker on the porch, drooping from the humid heat, fanning himself with a palm leaf, and would scarcely speak to us.

"I guess you ain't got nothing coming to you," he droned, staring out at the heat-waves dancing over his acres of rice. "I never really hired you, except when I told you to cook, and you made a fizzle of that. That fool Swede never got my consent to hire you."

"But you let us keep on working after you came," I protested.

"That was your look-out. Why didn't you see me?"

His listless monotone was more galling than any hot blustering. I was just about to flare into a temper when he rose, without a word, and leading the way toward the front gate, crossed the road in front of the flour-mill to the general store, where was located the office of the timekeeper.

The timekeeper, a near-sighted, fawning, spectacled creature, a little wizened, smirking, baldheaded bird, thumbed his ledger and whined: "Names, please. — Hm, I don't find yours here."

"You see —" began Boyd.

"Call in the foreman who hired us," I insisted.

Boyd sent one of the Indians working in the store out to hunt up the Swede.

"Did you hire these two?" Boyd asked the foreman as soon as he came in.

"Yas. I tell dem dey work for fify centavos a day and ven you vas come, you vas to tell dem if dey work any more here."

He and Boyd rowed back and forth.

"Nobody's going to bamboozle me," declared Boyd.

The Swede retorted angrily. "Bane gut. I leave you. Two times already you do dis. Why you beat dem two fallows out of a few cents? I bane goin' leave."

"All right, I'll pay them," snapped Boyd and sent him out again.

Then, to us: "Let's see, you've been here nine days. Right? — But the three days of the storm you didn't work."

"We carried grain to the horses through the rain, and we got out and made mud dikes around one of the warehouses, and I slept by the door in your house ——"

Boyd made a deprecatory gesture. "That's not work. Six days. Six days or nothing."

We were forced to agree.

The book-keeper spoke up with an ingratiating whine. "Of course, the three days you ate ——"

"Naturally," interrupted Boyd. "For meals when men don't work — they're good meals too — we charge a peso a day. Let's see, you worked, each of you, six days. At fifty centavos a day that's three pesos. Three days you didn't work — three pesos for meals. I guess I don't owe you anything anyway. You can clear out."

"You can clear out," echoed the book-keeper.

Too angered to realize what I was doing, I snatched up his ledger and smacked the book-keeper across the face with it. He reeled back, spilling an inkwell over his papers.

"None of that!" cried Boyd, and called to the two Indians working in the store to come over. To me he added menacingly: "You'd better not start any monkey business. I can have you thrown out on your ear in short order."

III

We faced the twenty-five-mile walk back to Cajeme. The road was knee-deep with yellow water. The whole countryside was still flooded. The heat and glare from the shimmering surface struck our faces brutally. Our feet sucked down in the oozy mud. A crow cawed. Far off came the chug of a gas engine, faint muffled strokes. We rolled our trousers to the crotch and set out.

I felt disheartened, beaten. The excessive heat, the exhausting experiences of the past weeks, Boyd's currish treatment, our loss of pay, all combined to break down our spirit. As we swished along in the flooded water, I shook my fist and cursed. Our very impotence intensified my hate.

"I'm going back and kill that dirty lean worm, even if I have to swing for it." I whirled about.

Ralph grabbed my arm. "Don't be crazy."

We plodded on, sullenly. A quarter of a mile farther on we met the Swede foreman.

"You bane going now? You get your dinero?"

My anger boiled over again. "Not a red cent!"

"Yumpin' Yimminy. He bane rotten mean. What you tank to do now?"

"Go back to Cajeme, I guess."

He nodded. "An' yust you go to the Labour Board in Esperanza, and tell 'm what he done. Yust you never mind. Dey make him pay."

"What's the use? Cajeme is twenty-five miles off. Esperanza is ten miles from Cajeme. And while the thing is being

investigated, we'd have nothing to live on. All we could get at most would be six pesos. That's a lot to us, but —— ”

“ You bane right. No gut. He bane a robber, and he have dat Board by the noses. You get nothing.”

“ Well, so long.” We went on about four yards.

“ Yust wait a minute,” called the Swede.

He held out a peso to us.

We thanked him and went on. “ Blame decent ! ” commented Ralph.

But my anger against Boyd kept rising in my gorge. “ Say,” I finally exploded. “ I'm going to fix that evaporated devil.”

“ What can you do ? ” protested Ralph.

“ Out in the shed he has an auto truck. I'm going back to take out the platinum points and throw them into the mud. That'll cost him more than our wages and he'll have to wait a month to get new ones.”

And before Ralph could protest further, I turned on my heel and cut down a side lane.

IV

Close beside a fence back of the warehouse in the rear of the Granje and near the out-shed where the Ford was kept, I crouched down behind some bushes to get the lay of the land.

The low, adobe buildings squatted apathetically in the yellow water. How Sing came to the kitchen door to throw out some suds. From the blacksmith shed came the beat of William's hammer on the anvil. An unfettered horse — the one that had trampled on the cabbages — meandered forlornly through the empty, flooded yard.

Now or never ! In a second I was inside the auto shed, adjusting my eyes to the gloom. The truck was covered with a

canvas tarpaulin. I lifted this. A sudden squawking made me jump back.

An angry sitting hen fluttered out from under the machine. With frightened, ruffled feathers she perched on the windshield, making a great racket. Her squawking alarmed me lest it might have attracted attention. I gave a swipe at her and she flew cackling out the door.

I listened intently. Just outside I heard the swash of the horse. Suppose someone came to get him! Suppose I was caught!

A noise on the other side of the wall!

I strained my ears. Someone was in the warehouse, moving boxes about.

Again I lifted the canvas. My hand shook. A second's work to take out the platinum points. I peeked out the door. The coast was clear. In a jiffy I was back to the fence and crawling through. Someone called from the blacksmith shop. I stooped low. Silence, except for that stray horse. I hurried back across the fields. In about three quarters of an hour I had rejoined my brother.

CHAPTER XVII

BUILDING A HUT

I

EVERY road toward Cajeme was under water. The irrigation ditches had all overflowed. The entire country-side was a glistening sheet, broken only by the trees, embankments, a few sad houses, and the tops of the taller crops that had miraculously survived storm and flood.

We waded on, trousers rolled to the crotch, water up to our knees, often up to our waist, on and on under the blazing sun in the heat and the glare. Our skin itched and crawled. Our eyes smarted.

By nightfall we had covered only a third of the distance to town. Twilight descended upon us; with it — mosquitoes, swarms of mosquitoes, black clouds of mosquitoes! They stung us viciously, on the hands, the face, the legs. They lit on our backs and stung us through shirt and underwear. They buzzed — buzzed — buzzed — deafening the ears — tormenting the nerves.

The sun went down in a red haze, and a fiery glow blazed a path across the forlorn, flooded fields. The trees stood out, etched black against the red sky. We huddled on the damp slope of a high bank. No dry wood to start a fire, not enough room on the damp turf even to stretch out. Our feet touched the water.

The mosquitoes became ever more vicious. We wrapped the suffocating folds of our blankets tight about our heads.

We couldn't breathe. The night was sweltering, humid; our bodies oozed sweat. The mosquitoes somehow wriggled in inside our blankets. I put on a sweater as a further barrier and sweated still more. But the ravenous mosquitoes continued to torment me mercilessly. I could hear them hum through the folds of my blanket, buzz, buzz, buzzing, an ever fiercer zzzzzzzing that tautened our nerves, drove us mad by its persistent menace. I have heard of people in swamp lands going insane in a single night from mosquitoes. I do not doubt it. All night long those mosquitoes buzzed and crawled through the folds of our blankets, stinging us into a fury of impotence.

Morning! Slimy bodies! Depressed minds! Once more a blistering day of struggle through the water — swish, chug, swish, chug, swish, chug, hour after hour, the vapour rising up in steam, the sun pouring on our backs.

Everywhere houses flooded, adobe walls melted, crops beaten down by the storm.

We came to a muddy hollow; Indian huts, walls half washed away, floors under water, household goods piled high on boxes or rotting in the mud. The women wretched, miserable. At first they refused to give us anything to eat. "*No hay manteca* — there is no grease" — their phrase for "Nothing to eat." But at one hut we insisted until we were given *garbanzos*, *tortillas*, and coffee.

About four o'clock we were out of the jungle and in the llano. Here the water had run off or evaporated. The road was a mess of hard ruts with occasional bog holes. A raw-boned, hard-jawed American, his hat brim low over his puckered, sun-smitten eyes, gave us a lift in his buckboard. He laughed in his throat at our plight. "You'll pull through," he encouraged. "I've been all over this country — in the old days before the railroad was shoved through. I've gone forty miles, sixty miles, under the stinking hot sun with my stomach

up against my backbone. I've been strung up on a tree and shot at and cut down for dead. And here I am still farming in the Río Yaqui, taking a chance they tell me. But I don't have any more trouble and won't, because the Indians know I'm their friend. I've always stood by the Yaks, through thick and thin, and the regular Mex hate me like p'ison, but they know better than to bother me. I've had trouble in my time, I have. — You fellows don't know what trouble is —

“How'd you like the flood? Some humdinger, eh? Hit me hard. River broke right above the house. I told my old lady to shinny up a tree and shinny fast, and by God she shinnied. First time in her life she ever did what I told her to without a lot of foolish palaver.” —

We pulled into Schneider's at sundown and sat over a big pot of rice and dried meat, and stretched our blankets in the hay, and slept that night in peace.

The next morning we told Schneider about Boyd's treatment of us.

Schneider shook his head regretfully. “I knew he was a cur, but I didn't know he had fallen so low as to beat two American boys out of six pesos. The dirty dog! — What'll you do now? —” He scratched his head. “I could keep you busy for about a week building a *jacal* on the rear of my place. I'll pay you seventy-five centavos a day and grub, and you can get right to work if you've a mind.”

II

Buckets of mud! Buckets of mud! Buckets of mud up to the roof!

I swung my load wearily before me. Standing on top of the adobe shack that my brother and I were building, I stared down at the miserable hovels of Cajeme, then out across the sunbaked llano. Far off towards the jagged Sierras rose a

puff of dust. I watched it come closer and grow larger until out of it whirled a horse and rider. Pampam, a tall Yaqui Indian, galloped past the yellow railway station, across the tracks, and circled his corral of cattle with a scurry of hoofs, swinging his black horse-hair lariat over his head. Flashing down past his stout cabin, he scooped up his four-year-old child Paco to his saddle with one sweep of his long arms. Paco's little red shirt slid almost up to his ears as he landed in the saddle in front of his father. He clung to the pommel, chortling with glee, as Pampam dashed off towards the thick jungle that lay along the Yaqui River.

A bugler, red braid dangling from his sleeve, slouched out from the barracks in front of the military warehouse, and blew a shrill, unpleasant blast. A motley crew of tatterdemalion soldiers drifted out to form a sloppy line. The fat commandant, who had been playing cards in the shade on the platform of the warehouse, reluctantly laid down his hand, threw away his cigarette, and waddled out in front of the soldiers. " 'Tention, dress right, eyes right, break ranks," he called out in a weary, sweated tone.

Our labour was back-breaking. In this terrible lowland sun of the south, every move was a killing effort. First, with machetes we sliced off the bark from the straight trunks of six hardwood trees, crotched at the end. The posts once skinned, we stuck them in holes and tamped them tight, giving proper slope to the roof. Three stout cross-poles of the proper length were next located in the crotches of each pair of posts and wired fast. Over these we placed bamboo poles, which we wired to the beams at half-inch intervals. Schneider was much concerned about the way we handled these poles, saying they cost him fifteen centavos apiece, for they grew only up the Río Yaqui, where the Indians were rampant, so that it was a life hazard to sneak up there to cut them. On top of the bamboo poles we scattered loose straw to the

depth of about a foot. Then the real work began. We had to go out into the llano, dig up red clay, tote it into the corral in wheelbarrows, mix it with water and straw until it had a smooth semi-fluid consistency, shovel it into buckets, and shoulder it up to the roof on an improvised staircase of bales of hay. We spread the mud six inches thick over the straw, which crushed down quite compactly under the weight. This coating hardened; the cracks we then filled in with mud. When the filling dried we poured water over the entire surface and smoothed it down with the back of spades. After another interval of drying, we pitched loose earth on top to prevent guttering by rain-water. Around the sides we ran baling-wire from post to post. Between the six main posts we tied slender uprights of paloverde, about six inches apart, between which we wove pliable branches, giving a sort of wattle effect, like that of a coarsely made wicker chair. At night we would cook up batches of rice and sausage for ourselves, Schneider, and his clerk, Joe, a mild youth with large horn-rimmed spectacles.

III

While we were digging in the llano, the neighbour Indian boys came to watch us. Chubby little Juan became my mascot. He hung about us, asking infinite questions about my experiences and adventures. One day he took the spade from my hand and dug up a plant with small pinkish flowers, which was scattered profusely about. The root was about three times the size of an ordinary turnip — much like a sugar-beet in size, shape and colour. Whisking out his knife, he peeled off the cortex and sliced the flesh into white strips, which he ate with relish. I tasted it. The flavour was insipid. He told us that it was much better cooked with panocha sugar. "You see," he commented, "you don't have to starve in Mexico,

nor work, either, if you don't want to." He dug up the root of another weed — a root about the size and shape of a parsnip. This had a bitter, yet rich flavour.

We met queer characters at Schneider's. Besides tall, black-eyed Pampam of the cattle and the stoutly built cabin, there was his grown son, Pancho, who with his wife, Rosita, also lived in the cabin. Pancho helped Pampam with the cattle, especially with the milking. He was a reckless devil who always had his hand on his gun ready for a fight. And he was doubly quarrelsome from heavy drinking — mescal and cognac — and smoking *morihuana*, an insidious native drug. He was a man to be avoided; yet there was often a wild jollity, even in his quarrelsomeness, that made him friends as well as enemies. He had been in the States and spoke a much admired slang.

Skemp, a frequent loungee at the store, was a cadaverous Texan who had turned Mex and married a native wife, who did all the hard work on his twenty-acre farm. Skemp had as many vertebræ in his dorsal region as a jelly-fish; his talk was a shamble; his movements, leaden; his chief job in life, to do nothing except swallow his protruding Adam's apple, wrinkle up his quivering, pointed nose and talk in an endless stream in a shrill, quaky voice while he constantly ran his freckled hands over his face and sandy moustache with a far-away look in his bleary, blue eyes. He was avid for white companionship and would lean against the counter for hours, "chewing the rag" in racy lingo.

Joe, the clerk, looked and acted like one of Booth Tarkington's adolescents. How and why he had ever landed in this outlandish burg of Cajeme we never found out. He was one of those Schlemihls whom fate chastises for every little sin, making him pay double for his failures what most men pay for their successes. He had been playing about with Juana, the buxom Indian wife of one of the railway inspec-

tors who was away a good deal. She flirted and coquetted, but managed to keep him at arm's length. But the afternoon when I had paused with my bucket of mud to stare over the llano I saw Joe walk into the front yard of Juana's *casita* and disappear under the thick grape trellis. He reappeared near the stoop, but instead of Juana, her husband, Antonio, the inspector, came out. Joe nodded pleasantly and held out his hand.

Instead of taking it, Antonio whipped out a gruesome machete and leaped at him. Joe took to his heels and dashed across the railroad tracks towards the chaparral in the direction of the hills. Antonio was half a jump behind him, nip and tuck, nip and tuck, two racing figures. Down they dipped into a hollow, lost to sight. —

Antonio came back presently, nervously stroking his machete on his trousers leg. He refused to talk to the excited group that immediately surrounded him, but pushed on sullenly into the *casita*. We heard him beating Juana, who shrieked for dear life.

Everybody feared Joe had been killed. We went out to look for him, but neither hide nor hair could we find. Then, after dark, Joe showed up — a sorry-looking sight. He had dashed head on into the thick chaparral — mesquit, yucca, agave, cactus. The cruel thorns had ripped his clothing to shreds. At a small *barranca* he had jumped in head first, bruising and tearing his hands and face and breaking his glasses — a jump he would never had dared make under ordinary circumstances. "At that moment I would have jumped into hell itself," he told us. When he hit the *barranca*, he went scrambling along on all fours through the cactus, and husband Antonio gave up the chase; just when, Joe never really knew.

Joe trembled like a leaf when he told his tale and was all for skipping out that very night for Esperanza. Schneider,

who didn't wish to lose Joe, who was a careful and honest employé, went over to establish a truce with Antonio, carrying Joe's promise to keep away from Juana henceforth. Antonio expressed himself as quite satisfied with this promise and sent word to Joe that he knew how to take care of his wife.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE WHITE TOAD

I

MEANWHILE, news of the rebellious Yaquis grew worse. They had attacked Esperanza, only ten kilometres up the line, scattered the garrison, and dragged the commandant and his aide around the village faces down, feet tied to the tails of two horses, until the two officers were dead. At the coast the Yaquis had captured a ranch owner, his wife, and two boys and sliced off the soles of their feet; then had smashed them with clubs. The Yaquis on the war-path were devils incarnate.

Fortunately Cajeme was set in the centre of a wide, treeless llano and could not be ambushed. Besides, it was largely settled by semi-civilized Yaquis, who had more or less traffic with their savage brothers in the mountains and therefore enjoyed immunity. Even the commandant who sat in front of the warehouse all day long playing cards was a Yaqui, so that nobody here was alarmed.

About this time we had a strange visitant. A stubby fat man, naked as the day he was born, came staggering across the llano. Skemp was standing at the store entrance, his pointed, lean jaw resting on his sharp collar-bone. Suddenly his long nose quivered.

"By hickory nut! Do you suppose — Bolton — Thaddeus Bolton Jones, sure as I'm a born rabbit!"

With a shout that scared his own sorrel horse into ripping

two bamboos out of the paling in front of the store he forgot his shamble and dashed towards the strange apparition.

Just this side the tracks the man collapsed, and Skemp and I dragged him into the store and laid him on the counter to recover.

That night, squatting on our haunches beside the cactus corral under the stars and puffing black cigarettes, we talked over the new-comer, whom both Skemp and Pancho, Pam-pam's son, knew.

"I thought sure the Yaquis had killed him, as I told you the other day," remarked Pancho.

Skemp nodded. "Poor cuss," he muttered. His pale blue eyes grew watery. "We warned him, we warned him — Do you remember how he looked the day he stepped off the Wednesday south-bound — a round, sawed-off nut with a big head and steel-rimmed specs — carrying a Bible in his fat hand? Holy smoke!" and Skemp went on to tell Thaddeus's story.

"Used to be a soul saver and sob artist in a Bowery mission. Sez as how he'd come down to convert the Yaqui Indians. Saving Bowery bums had become too tame since booze went out. Poor chump! We tried our darn'est to scare him out of his fool idea, but he must have had wooden ears for all the good it done. He said he hadn't come all the way down to Mexico just to turn around and beat it back. He wanted to know where to find 'em — the Yaquis I mean — he was that ignorant. I just swept my arm over them raw-boned Sierras, blue and jagged like sawteeth, an' I sez, 'There they be, mister, everywhere,' an' I told him some hair-raisin' yarns — true they was, too — about what the Yaks could do to sweet-intentioned missionaries. But Thaddeus smiled so sweet-like I wanted to choke his chubby throat till his blue eyes popped. He guessed as how the Yaquis really needed Jesus. 'It's because they ain't been treated right,' sez he. 'I've read all

no, o
Jesus
saves
souls

about it. They lost their lands and were hornswoggled by the government.' The poor nut to give us a line like that!

"We told him about some peons hacked to mincemeat with machetes and other tales I wouldn't tell to no man except to save his life — they're that horrible. But they only eagered him to be off. He sez as how the only thing under the sun he was real scared of was women. — Them 'n booze, sez he, had sent him to the bow-wows. I knowed he was tellin' the truth — he was an awful truthful guy — for I seen his blue eyes bulge when Schneider poured out some of that bootleg mescal one day. And when Juana, the woman that Joe made a fool of hisself over, came to the counter to buy sugar, he had a sharp eye cocked on her ankles, which ain't so bad, as you may 've noted.

"Anyhow we just hated to see Thaddeus go and commit suicide this way and tried to put the kibosh on his little expedition. Thaddeus was a pretty good guy, outside of being daffy about converting Yaks — honest and full of pep in spite of his soft blue eyes; and as soon as he had a glass of that there mescal under his belt, he had a real punchy man-to-man way of talking that made you want to scratch to keep out of the devil's own clutches.

"But I suppose as how we thought him a sort of joke till that affair with little Paco, Pampam's kid."

II

Skemp rubbed his back against a post and went on. "How, these here civilized Yaks around Cajeme spend half their time up yonder in the hills, and even when they're here like law-abidin' critters they carry on secret-like with them wild birds up there. Pampam is the richest Yak here, and for all of his being a yellow-belly, richer 'n Schneider, I reckon. They say as how he sells the wild Yaks up there guns and

bullets and other stuff on the q. t. He's a good friend of the commandant of the garrison, too, that fat guy that sits over there in the shade all day playing cards. They're hand in glove, and people sez as how there's queer goin's-on.

"But I gotta tell you what happened to Pampam's kid, Paco. You know Paco toddles around in a red flannel shirt that scarce covers his little belly, and from a way off he looks like a red poppy growin' on the llano. Well, one day Pampam's mad *torro* broke corral. It pawed around; then, seein' that fool red shirt, it charged straight at the little shaver. Darn if I didn't stand stock-still like a piece o' dead cactus — couldn't wiggle a toe, nor yell, nor nothin'. God, I was petrified, plum' petrified.

"Old Pampam saw the bull smokin' toward Paco, too, but little good it done him, he was so far off. And then we both piped Thaddeus. He'd been lyin' curled up under the big oak back there, readin' his Bible.

"He hopped up, two squeaky jumps ahead of Mister Bull. He grabs Paco by his red shirt, Paco yellin' like a pack o' devils. The horns of that there bull were right under Thaddeus's coat-tails when he grabbed the kid. But somehow — fool's luck, I guess — he side-stepped. God looks after these religious nuts.

"The bull pounded past, his nostrils shootin' fire. Believe me, Thaddeus couldn't 've done it neater if he'd a been an honest-to-God bullfighter. Well, Thaddeus, he scampered for the fence for dear life, but it was clickin' close, I can tell you, with that black hulk of a bull gainin' every jump. Jesus, I was all-fired scared!

"By this time Pampam had got into action and came rippin' along like holy hell on his cayuse, tryin' to side-track that brute with his sombrero, but the bull was plum *loco* to stick his horns into that flutter of red rag. Sort a had it in for all good bolos, I reckon. Thaddeus, he looked like a puff-ball

bein' whiffed along by the smoke from that critter's nostrils. When he reached the fence, I snatched the kid from his arms and turned away quick so as not to see.

"But when I plumped Paco down, I heard Thaddeus's voice gasping sort of sick-like at my elbow: 'S all right, 's all right.'

"He was as yellow as an onion skin.

"Pampam, he told us that Thaddeus '*escapó por un pelo*' — escaped by a hair — and when we looked at the second bar of the fence — made of oak mind you — we found a big hunk split off by the bull's horns.

"I bet that bull had a headache for a week.

"We give Thaddeus a few drinks to make him more persuadable. He could drink like a fish all right, sure queer for a missionary. But he 'fessed up to bein' an old booze-hound afore he got religion. The drink, though, made him all the more sot on his idea of tagging on up to the mountains.

" 'Do you think I'm scared to die?' he wanted to know, his eyes shining like two new gold pieces. 'That's because you don't know Thaddeus Bolton Jones, Jr.' — he patted his round little chest — 'I've seen all of life, the best and the worst, all of it. I've mixed with good men and bad; good women and bad; saints and devils and beasts; and the worst devil is a bit of a saint,' he sez. 'And them Yaquis, well, the worst savage 'll do the square thing according to his reckonin' if you treat him square.' Like that he talked. 'I've had everything,' he sez, 'schoolin', opportunity. I bit dents in a silver spoon as soon as my teeth came through. I flung gold eagles at actresses in college, and when the old man shut down on the coin, I cheated at cards. I was kicked out of my frat; I was kicked out of my father's office. I made a fortune double-crossing a partner. I let it slip through my fingers. Oh, I've seen all of life, I have; but all through it I've been plum *loco* for drink and women, just like an itch. There's

nothing too low I didn't stoop to, and even now —— Well, I almost ended my days on a Bowery bench. That's when I opened my peepers and got religion. And I want to tell you right here,' he sez, 'it's a blame good thing to hang to, religion is.'

"Well, Thaddeus was to leave the next morning. We tried to put one last scare into him, but you might as well have whispered to a Kansas cyclone to stop. Even Pampam told us that we oughtn't to let Thaddeus go up to the Yaks."

Skemp's voice, as we sat there silent, listening, by the fence behind the store, was very low and serious. We smoked awhile, staring solemnly across the night-clad llano. Pancho lit a match, and I could see Skemp's profile and caught the motion of his prominent Adam's apple as he cleared his throat and went on with his story:

"Thaddeus was set, no changing him. 'Them Yaquis need me,' he sez. 'And I need the Yaquis. It's only when a man's doing good that he feels happy. Don't you feel a warm glow inside of you after you've helped some poor bugger? Just like a shot of whisky! It's because men can't see, because they're blind, that the world's so miserable. Look at this country!' He swept his hand out toward the llano. And we looked. It was a night just like this. The stars up there were gleaming like big lamps and the Milky Way like a gilt pony trail from the swamp trees down on the river to the mountains, cruel and sharp as hound's teeth. We could hear the breezes flapping the palms on the store-roof and every breath, you swallowed mesquit and sage.

"'Look at this country,' Thaddeus, he sez, 'mighty, open, room for the world; yet you spend half your time scrapping with the Yaquis. That's why I'm going over there, to make 'em peaceable.'

"'Can you talk Yaqui,' I asks him.

"'I'll learn it,' sez he.

"Now what can you do with a guy like that? — Well, when Thaddeus started out the next morning with only his Bible, a few *tortillas*, and a canteen, Pancho, here, cantered over on his cayuse and followed along solemn, without a word. Pampam sent him, I guess, for Thaddeus's havin' saved little Paco. But we doubted whether Pancho here 'd save Thaddeus. Anyway we watched Pancho's sombrero bob out of sight and went inside and forgot all about 'em both.

"That was nigh on eight months ago, and here comes Pancho back a couple of days ago, telling us Thaddeus is dead. What'd you tell us that for, Pancho?"

III

Pancho, who had been standing, leaning against a post, squatted down and lit another black cigarette. "The story's thees way," he began drawlingly in his bastard *patois*. "We moseyed along toward the big butte. I try to head off south into Tarahumaro country, where I know him be safe. But *diablo que hombre!* He go where he like and I follow. We no meet up with nothing that night — just reach first row of mountains you see from here. He have pretty cheely night, but spend most time prayin', like this." Pancho dropped on his knees, drawing down the corners of his mouth, solemn as a billy-goat. "I keep his belly warm with *tequila* till the sun rise up. Then we creep up river canyon, where no have been I never.

"By second night, him good and tired. He cross river eighty-four times, I count 'm — his clothes get soaking wet, oh, so very wet. All right when the sun it hot, but by shadow time which come pretty much soon — that canyon so narrow, so deep — his teeth chatter in his head.

"I no want to build fire, no know nothing about this part of the country, and we eat a few *tortillas* and a little *atole* —

you know, corn, ground and roasted, put in water; you drink 'm cold.

“ By morning, little bald-head, he have cheells much bad; but he keep along. The second day we see few pines in afternoon, when shadows get blue; the canyon it open out like the mouth of a fish, catched on a hook — trees and cornfields they have there. I see bunch of straw roofs. I want to make Thaddeus go in brush and me look around. But he no like, want to go straight in.

“ So I let him go by himself, sneak my cayuse in among some willow shoots what grow thick along through chaparral. Thaddeus, he reach village all right, all right, but there he fall down like drunk.

“ I sneak up close by. Two bucks in loin-cloths come up to him, the biggest Yaks I ever see. They make bald-head look like little fat kid, what you call 'm, doll. They sit there, try make up minds what do with him. At last they tell squaws drag him into village.

“ They talk pretty tame, so I risk going in. The old men they come up to me much hurry. All jabber to once. They want know something about 'White Toad.' I think they mean Thaddeus and tell 'm how he saved Paco, that he white priest. This get them — how you say — much excitement.

“ Thaddeus soon seek, very seek. He have much fever, one week. When he get walk round, I do hees talk. I learn White Toad real honoured name. I guess they call him that 'cause he look just like toad when he splash through water and tumble out dead gone on the bank by village, just like toad. The people of that tribe they think they all sons off big toad that once sit on top of the mountains and cough up sun all mornings. Anybody who kill a toad get dead hisself, so not bring seekness or hide the sun — what you call 'm — eclipse.

“ They say Thaddeus most elegant toad they ever see. They make him real *padre*, medicine-man. And d'you know

they've a church hid way under cliff. Some Gachupín, Spaniard, built 'm long go back in Cortés's time. They put Thaddeus in there to do shindigs. He tog up in long gowns and put those devils on their faces, pray much pray. He some medicine man; they no know what he jabber any more 'n me. He no Catholic, but he sure do love swing them stink-pots." Pancho swung his arm to and fro to illustrate the swinging of incense burners.

"Well I think him in much solid, so I go 'way. More late I go back. I hear they kill him. Too bad. I much sorry. Now, why he come here no clothes on when he be dead, I do' know. I no can tell you why that be."

He shrugged and puffed at his cigarette. "*Buenas noches*," he said abruptly. Tucking in the end of his sash and flinging his red sarape over his shoulder, he ambled away through the balmy night.

Skemp and I were sitting there smoking when we heard a muffled "*Arrah!*" and the scrape of a burro against the outside of the cactus fence. A low whistle, repeated twice!

Schneider came out and spoke in a low tone to a person on the other side.

The moon had gone down and it was quite dark, but we could see someone tugging at two poles set among the cactus. An old Indian stepped through, a man in Pampam's employ. He worked at the cinches of his burro for a few moments, then unloaded two pigskin bladders, which he carried on into the rear of the store. Presently he returned, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

Schneider came out with a lantern and invited us into a dark little room containing a number of kegs. He closed the door behind us carefully.

"A little moonshine *tequila*," he laughed. "We have prohibition here in Sonora, you know, and I have to watch P's and Q's. Here's a glass all round. To-morrow a troop-train

is coming through. A peso a glass, not so bad, eh? And the whole pigskin only costs me five pesos. Pampam's in with the commandant, so there's not much risk."

IV

The next day we got the rest of the story of the missionary expedition from Thaddeus himself.

"I don't rightly know what happened," he began dazedly. "The Yaquis are queer folk, you know, very queer. They have their shamans, medicine-men, you know; and these fellows were pretty incensed that an outsider should come in and undermine their influence. As near as I could make out, they managed to convince the tribe, through some taboo I broke, and someone who fell sick, that I was a sorcerer. Three of the leading shamans built huts outside the church and began praying for me to die, and all the Indians were afraid to come to church. Then there was a girl — well, we'll leave that part of the story alone. All I know is that I could tell feeling was running high against me. So I built a hut outside the church door and began to pray for the leading shaman to die. Pretty soon he got so frightened he got sick, and then they all thought me a great magician. So they left me alone.

"But pretty soon the shamans got to talking again and I soon saw I'd have to get out, for the girl said they were getting ready to kill me. Anyway no one came to church any more. So I skipped out. But they were on the watch and caught me. As I realize now, they wanted to punish me, but couldn't kill me because of their taboos. I was still the White Toad. They never transgress their superstitious taboos, and so they couldn't kill me. But they did unto me worse than death.

"They sprinkled cactus spines over a fifty-yard path; then

the whole tribe in the order of age, children, women, men, lined up in two rows facing each other, holding clubs spiked with cactus. Two wrinkled squaws stripped off my clothes, every stitch, and placed me at the head of the runway. Then they called down the wrath of the gods on me and made me run over those cactus spines, hitting at me with their cactus clubs, all along that double row. Then they chased me across the river and down the valley. I ran, with all those brown devils whooping after me. How I got here I don't rightly understand. The ways of God are manifold. It is a lesson in the true faith."

After Thaddeus left us, we talked awhile; then we sat there thinking about his strange yarn. "What do you suppose ——" Skemp peered at me, his long nose trembling and wrinkled up, his yellow teeth poking out over his lower lip. "It's too dog-gone queer for me ——" He shook his head. "Poor simp. Willing to give up his life for those damn' heathens and then to get it in the neck this way. It sure is funny what religion do's to a guy."

Skemp and Schneider outfitted Thaddeus with clothes — Skemp a coat that wouldn't button, and Schneider a pair of trousers that came up to Thaddeus's arm-pits and had legs that lapped over by six inches. But Thaddeus's troubles weren't over. He had got a rotten dose of poison oak and in a few days was a sight. His body was redder than cayenne pepper, and his eyes swelled shut for nearly a week.

He decided he was cured of converting Yaquis; he felt called to aid the Negroes of the South, he told us, though he said if God willed it he'd go back into Yaqui country. But the call for him now was Atlanta, Georgia — if we could lend him a few dollars for railroad fare.

"I've sinned, that's all; that's the whole trouble. That girl —— And my pretending to be Catholic and all that ——

I've sinned." He grieved with a sorrowful pucker of his round face.

"Well, if you have," philosophized Skemp, paying his unknowing respects to the Nemesis theory, "I guess God punished you good and proper."

We put Thaddeus aboard a north-bound and saw him disappear with a last wave of his pudgy hand. But Thaddeus Bolton Jones, Jr., the White Toad, has gone down for all time in the legends of Cajeme — one more Yaqui story.

CHAPTER XIX

THE YAQUIS

I

OUR *jacal* was finished. What to do next we had no idea. After Thaddeus's experiences we were not so keen about setting out immediately for the Río Yaqui to look for our cache of gold. Later, perhaps, when the Yaquis were off their rampage.

But we heard of no work in the vicinity, so we continued to lie up in Schneider's haystack. The nights were now quite cool, for autumn was coming on: the dew was unusually heavy, and the llano soon became a mass of pink and yellow flowers. But the dew was bad. We would wake up in the morning, our blankets soaked, our hair and lashes fuzzy with white moisture. The damp crept into my bones, and I would wake up with the most insupportable rheumatic pains in my back and legs. These pains drove away sleep. Three or four times every night I would have to get up and run down the road in front of the store for about fifteen minutes at a go in order to get my blood into circulation.

To keep from spending our hard-earned pittance, we took to various means of adding to our slim diet. Around the rear of the place were hundreds of fat blackbirds; so we rigged up a number four trap with wheat grains as bait and trapped dozens of the birds. They were pestilence itself to dress and worse to eat, they had so many small bones. Several times we were fortunate and caught pigeons. And in the

irrigation ditches were fish. We rigged up a line and hooked some tiny specimens. All this helped out considerably.

One day the commandant, who had heard that I had once been a teacher, sent word over he would like to see me about establishing a school in Cajeme. I had carefully guarded in a piece of newspaper the silk shirt and tie I had bought in Hermosillo. I put these on and trimmed up my beard — for all this time I had had no opportunity to shave.

When I came up to the warehouse, the fat commandant laid down his cards and greeted me warmly. After a few exchanges he took me inside to see his wife and daughter Inez. The latter, he informed me, would be my assistant. She was a slim, anæmic girl, with a bilious complexion and a frail charm and shyness. The commandant called his wife out and left me and Inez together, a sly look on his heavy, big-jowled face.

As we could have no school in Cajeme until a building was put up, I realized that the conference about it was really a secondary matter. Hereabouts a white man, whatever his status, is considered a good marital catch, and, though I had been building a *jacal* at seventy centavos a day, I well knew that if I agreed to teach school and make a hint of taking the daughter — benefit of clergy might not even be required — ways and means would be discovered for assisting me and my brother. And if I failed to find the daughter interesting, the commandant might easily get offended and make trouble of one sort or another. My experiences in Querobabi had taught me the power of these local caciques or tyrants. But I had not the least desire to settle in Cajeme and help populate Yaqui-land.

Luckily we met a Mexican farmer who owned a cleared but isolated piece of ground in the jungles near Esperanza. Fear of the raiding Yaquis was so general that he could get no workmen. He gladly took us on — seventy-five centavos a

day, rations of corn and beans and guns and ammunition for self-protection. The land, planted to corn, needed to be cleared of the rank undergrowth. The work was not unpleasant, as we were our own bosses. At the end of the week the owner came down to see what we had done and to pay us. We had worked leisurely, but he was more than satisfied.

Though we constantly kept our rifles beside us while working, nothing happened, and we began to lose our sense of fear, even laughed at the idea of being molested. But on the tenth day a bullet zipped through the field from the jungles. We flung ourselves face down on the ground and crawled toward our rifles, some yards distant. For fully half an hour we lay there, peering on all sides towards the impenetrable jungle around us. But no one appeared. Whoever had fired the shot at us had evidently taken himself off. Too excited to do any work, we spent the rest of the day in a little hollow, hugging our rifles. Three apprehensive days followed. We worked very desultorily, with frequent glances at the mysterious wall of jungle hemming us in on all sides.

II

On the fourth day after the shot, Joe, Schneider's clerk, came down to see us. He had about three hundred pesos saved up and had a proposition to make. His idea was to rent some thirty acres of irrigated land south of Cajeme, on which to plant melons, which grow prolifically in this climate, yet command good prices. He wanted my brother and me and another fellow to go in with him. Joe would buy the tools with his money. We would each work for a peso a day. Half the crop would go to the owner for rent; the other half would be sold by us. Joe would then take half — a quarter of the whole — and the other quarter would be divided equally

among the four of us. It sounded good not to have to work where unseen rifles zipped bullets at us. Besides, we might make a little money. My brother, it was decided, would take the rifles back to our boss and draw our back pay. Joe, I, and the other chap, a Swiss named Wolman, would go to Esperanza to buy seed and tools. Joe and I reached Cajeme about ten o'clock in the morning, picked up Wolman, a queer chap who spent most of his time reading religious tracts. Despite everybody's warning that the Yaquis were killing and maiming in the vicinity, we set out immediately for Esperanza to buy the necessary supplies.

We followed the road that parallels the railroad tracks, gradually leaving the cleared llano of Cajeme behind us. The vegetation became more tropical, though there were no dense woods and jungles such as we had found over west, toward the Río Yaqui. Here, along the track, grew the usual chaparral of greasewood, mesquit, palo blanco and paloverde, cactus, and various species of aloe, fairly thick and in many places higher than our heads. Most of the time, however, we could see the jagged red Sierras chipping the eastern sky.

About half-way to Esperanza, on rounding a turn in the road, Joe, who was in the lead, emitted an exclamation. A group of armed Indians were burning the railroad bridge about a mile ahead.

"Yaquis!" we exclaimed at a breath and stopped, scared.

"Aw, come along, they won't bother us," urged Wolman, who had all along refused to believe any of the tales about the Yaquis.

Joe hesitated. "Who knows —— ? All right. What's the diff?"

But I still protested. "What's the use of unnecessary risks?"

"No risk," insisted Wolman. "They won't hurt us."

Both of them jumped on me to screw up my courage.

The flames were now leaping up from the railroad bridge and the Indians were shouting and dancing on the bank.

My judgment ticked: "Don't go on." And to Joe and Wolman I said: "I'm not going on. You can do what you like. But you'll not risk it if you aren't suicide-seeking fools."

I turned back for about a hundred feet, then stopped. I couldn't leave them to their fate; so I turned off into the brush and followed along after them through the sharp brambles and cactuses, parallel to the road, but quite out of sight.

About a quarter of a mile from the flaming bridge I crawled up on a knoll which commanded a view of the road and the conflagration. Joe and Wolman were now near the Indians, who were fascinatedly watching the dying flames.

Suddenly one of the Indians pointed in the direction of my companions. The shouting died away. The whole crew watched the two approach.

An Indian yelled a command. Joe and Wolman put up their hands.

The group clustered about them, jabbering excitedly. Then one of the Indians struck Joe across the face. He reeled back.

Joe and Wolman began removing their clothes. Next the Indians knotted their hands behind their backs, and the whole band, about a hundred of them, cut across through the brush in my direction.

I was terribly frightened. As they came closer I crawled towards denser growth. After a few yards I poked my head from behind a mesquit bush.

Not ten yards from me an Indian on horseback was standing on his stirrups, looking about him on all sides. I dropped flat, gasping, certain he had seen me.

The sharp thorns of the mesquit jabbed into me, but I dared make no sound. I lay on my face close under the bush, heart pounding, body trembling, tense as a coiled spring. Not a sound except the occasional cries of the Indians, passing through the hollow just east of my knoll. I lay there an eternity before daring to peek out to locate the Indian on horseback. Cautiously, very cautiously, I lifted my head. To my intense surprise and relief, he was now angling off around the knoll on which I was hidden. Again I crawled over the low cactuses, stabbing my hands at every move. In about ten yards of squirming over the ground I gained a still denser clump of chaparral. The Indians were quite close now. I could hear them distinctly, even could make out their faces as they swarmed into the open depression not more than a hundred yards away.

The man on horseback, evidently the leader, now gave sharp commands. Five gigantic Indians lifted Joe and Wolman and hurled them to the ground, then sat on top of them, pinioning their legs and arms. One of the Indians made some remark that was received by the others with loud whoops. The man on horseback sat expressionless, arms hanging loosely by his sides, the reins of his bridle unchecked on his pony's neck. One of the four Indians drew out a long knife, stooped down, took Joe's foot in his hand. I clutched at the branch of the spiked shrubs in front of me. The sunlight flickered in my eyes, the scene reeled and danced. —

There were four screams. — When I gazed out again, the fiends were beating the two boys to their feet with heavy clubs. They staggered into the brush. —

How long I lay there I do not know. —

Slowly, agonizingly, I crawled down the opposite side of the knoll and ran like a mad man through the chaparral toward Esperanza. The wild shouts of the Indians still came to my ears, though much fainter.

Once I stopped to listen. The sounds had died away. I looked down at my shaking hands. They were torn and bloody from the thorns I had clutched.

III

The afternoon shadows had already lengthened when I reeled into Esperanza.

"The commandant!" I gasped to the first man I saw.

He took me to the *cuartel* on the dead run. I poured out my story.

The commandant paced back and forth, caught up by my emotion.

"You must do something immediately," I cried. "We can't waste any time."

"Yes, yes —" he said and stopped pacing. He looked at me curiously, smoothing his hands nervously down the front of his mouse-colored uniform. "We must make a memorandum of all the facts first."

"My God —"

But he had already called his secretary-orderly.

"How many Yaquis did you say there were? — About a hundred? — And I have only eighty-five men."

"But eighty-five men, prepared, knowing the country —"

He shook his head gloomily. "Better that we go to-morrow morning. It is too late now. We can't fight the Yaquis in the dark."

"But those boys may still be alive. You can't —"

"Alive! Not if the Yaquis got hold of them. They are dead, you need have no fear."

"You — you — Give me a gun, a horse; I'll go myself. I'll — I'll —"

Two orderlies took hold of me and led me out. "Here, take this." One of them held a flask of *tequila* to my lips.

A third orderly overtook us. "The *Americano* is to sleep at Doña Cristina's to-night. We start to-morrow at seven. He is to be ready."

IV

All night I sat with my face in my hands, with the horror of the scene back there by the burning bridge whirling before me in one long, feverish nightmare. —

At six fifteen the orderlies came to take me to the *cuartel*.

There the soldiers were leisurely cinching up their horses and lashing on their supplies — a motley crew, with shabby uniforms and scraggly ponies. They dilly-dallied shamefully. No one seemed particularly eager to get off.

Even when the men were ready, the commandant did not put in an appearance. The sun rose higher and higher.

About nine the commandant passed them in review to the squeaking tune of cornets and rattling snare drums. Satisfied, he returned to his office. We waited until he should reappear. It was nine thirty before we cantered down the lanes of Esperanza between the high, adobe walls, laden with vines and the overhanging branches of fruit-trees, to the open country. —

We found Joe's and Wolman's battered bodies, but no Yaquis. Their tracks led straight away toward a sharp cleft in the red mountains.

The commandant leaned nonchalantly against a manzanita-tree while half a dozen soldiers scooped out a shallow grave for the two bodies.

The dead men covered, the commandant remarked: "We shall now go back to Esperanza. I have to write a report of this. And you, *señor*, where will you go?"

"Aren't you going after those fiends?"

He shrugged. "How can I follow them? They are up in the mountains by now. No one could find them; not in a mil-

lion years would my men follow up into the mountains. They are afraid of the Yaquis. If I had troops to my own liking ——” He lifted his left shoulder in a shrug, drew the corner of his lips, and held out his hands helplessly. “Where will you go? Back to Cajeme? I shall send a squad of men with you. It is dangerous to go alone, as you see.”

CHAPTER XX

BUMMING TRAINS

I

THIS horror quite ended all our dreams of gold in the Río Yaqui.

"No more. We've had enough of wildgoose chases and Yaquis." As I spoke I tried to light my pipe, but my hand shook so violently that my brother took the match from my fingers to light it for me.

We talked over plans and finally decided we'd go on towards Mexico City. We had a few pesos. True, Mexico City was worlds away, far south, the other side of the Sierras, up in the central plateau, but somehow we should keep from starving.

The south-bound trains, mixed freight and passenger, passed through here every other day. One was due on the morrow, and we made up our minds to jump it.

But unfortunately it carried no open box car, except one being used by a colonel and his staff going to help put down rebellion in Michoacán. Ralph and I went up and down both sides of the train, looking for a place to get on. The train began pulling out; so we had to make a last-minute scramble and tumbled on to a flat car.

The train had hardly gone half a mile when the conductor came running over the roofs from the engine.

"What you doing here?" he demanded, swinging his long arms to and fro to the motion of the train. "Where

you going? — Got any money?" One arm stiffened toward me.

I held out some loose change, about half a peso.

His lips curled into a sneer. "What you think I am? Give me three pesos and you can ride."

"We haven't so much."

"Don't give me that line. Three pesos or off you go."

We didn't wish to give him three pesos, so he ran back toward the engine. The train slowed down, came to a stop with a series of sharp jolts. The engine whistled violently. He reappeared. "All right, clear out."

We swung off sullenly. The train had stopped on a sharp curve. We happened to be on the outer bulge of the curve. When the train started again, the conductor was carried out of sight. A few cars rattled by. Hastily we jumped the iron ladder of a box car. As we did so, one of the cans of rice with which we had provided ourselves shook loose from my blanket roll, and bounced down the steep embankment, gone for good.

We sidled from the ladder around the corner, edging in between the ends of the two cars, and stood with our feet on the narrow ledges of each. Unfortunately neither car had any handholds and as the train gathered momentum, the two ledges jiggled up and down. And even though we pressed the palms of our hands against the facing ends of the cars, our position was dangerous and precarious.

Soon we were doing an involuntary dance, one foot high, one foot low. The train gathered more and more speed. The cars danced ever more violently. Once our feet slipped, nothing could save us from plunging down to the glinting steel rails shooting so dizzily beneath us — instant death!

The roadbed was very poor. The two cars leaped and plunged and rocked and jolted as though they had a ghoulis knowledge of our predicament, a sinister desire to dislodge

us, to fling us to our death. Soon our muscles became stiff and sore; our hands — rigid against the ends of the cars — utterly numb. Our arms burned and ached. Our legs felt like solid shafts of fire. Splitting pain ate through our very bones. The ground rushed past beneath us dizzily. Gravel spurted up, stinging and cutting our faces. My eyes blurred. My arms now grew dreadfully weak. My legs trembled; my body, though taut, felt utterly powerless, too exhausted to maintain the struggle. To stick to our footing became a gritting, clenching, nerve-shattering thing, demanding every ounce of energy, every ounce of will and attention. The cars lunged and reeled ever more frightfully.

Cold sweat crawled over my body. My breath came in sharp gasps as though I were running up a steep hill. We expected every moment to be our last. I had a mad impulse to jump out — to get free of the train, regardless of consequences. Every second became a prolonged, black eternity.

I grew so dizzy that I imagined myself actually falling — down — down. Time and again I stiffened my hands desperately against the two ends and stuck on grimly, frantically fighting for a clear head. We seemed always slipping, always just about gone down into the roar of the flying wheels.

It almost seemed as if my active consciousness had fled when the train slackened on a curve approaching a town. We eased our painful muscles and looked at each other. Without speaking we read each other's thoughts. We'd never risk another mile of this sort of torture. But even before the train came to a stop, the conductor, running over the cars, spied us.

He peered down at us, his face red with anger. He shook his long-armed fist at us. "You pests here — still?"

We smiled back — a smile of wan victory.

"Well" — the fist vibrated on the end of his long arm — "you'd better make tracks at this station."

We were only too glad to be off even before the train had quite stopped. We limped away — the conductor watching us go — out of sight behind the high piles of wood below the tracks.

II

After a bit we peeked out. The conductor had gone on down the train. We jumped out, close to the cars, and ran crouching alongside the train, hoping to find a new place to ride. But nothing seemed feasible. The train began to pull out.

"The armoured car!" cried Ralph, "the armoured car of the military escort."

We caught it on the fly — the last car. Pulling ourselves over the steel sides, we dropped among a group of ragged soldiers.

"Can we ride here?" I demanded of a bronze, slouching fellow.

He shrugged, nodding toward the captain, who stood with his back to us, arms akimbo, staring out across the barren country-side. He whirled around, frowning severely, as I addressed him.

"We have to go to Culiacán, the capital of Sinaloa. We haven't a cent. We are foreigners. Everything is very hard for us. Can we ride here?"

He looked at us curiously, with a hint of suspicion, then nodded his assent. "Go sit under the machine-gun tarpaulin, where the conductor won't see you." He turned again to stare fixedly across the desolate llano to the red crags to the east.

We crouched under the machine-gun till the train had gathered momentum; then we moved outside and sat down beside a group of soldiers playing *brisca* with Spanish cards, for cartridges. They were the usual ragged crew: torn, wrinkled khaki uniforms of a dirty, washed-out yellow

colour, sloppy leggings, shoes run down at the heels and toes sticking out.

A short, pock-marked fellow with peering eyes under thatched brows, offered us cigarettes, asking us about our most recent amatory experiences. He laughed coarsely — a jolly animal, he proved, convivial, kindly, Rabelaisian, brutal.

“One time I go to United States,” he started up in broken English. “Me no like. Very hard work, *mucho trabajo*, *mucho trabajo*. I come back. *Carajo!* I rather be soldier than among those *hijos de chinga’os* up there. Here I get me one uniform a year, shoes, cartridges for to gamble, every day corn and beans. When the Yaquis come, I going run away, not get killed. When the girls come, I love them, oh, very much, then run away too. Don’t like worry ’bout kids. Always they get kids. Too bad. Spoil much fun. I very much happy here, soldier, my Mexico.”

Suddenly he nudged us.

The sharp, angry face of the conductor was peering over the end of the armoured car. “You *cabrones* still here! I’ll stop the train and put you off again!”

The captain, dignifiedly aloof from his soldiers, arms crossed, staring out across the barren country towards the red mountains, now swung around on his heel. “They ride. Tend to your own business.”

The conductor mumbled something under his breath. We grinned, and his angry face disappeared. The train did not stop.

But at the next station, well out of the Yaqui zone, the armoured car was taken off. Once more we were without a place to ride.

We came to the open car of the colonel and asked him to take us in. He refused, but was very curious about us. We told him some of our adventures, and he became so interested

that he looked up and down the car to see if the conductor was in sight, then said: "Sneak around on the opposite side, so he won't see you, and pile in."

We rode all that afternoon. The colonel talked with us for hours on end, studying us intently all the time with his drowsy black eyes and asking us innumerable questions. He was very kind and shared his own meals with us.

We rode all night. Some time towards morning we reached San Blas on the Río Fuerte, a lazy, muddy stream just over the border of Sonora, in the State of Sinaloa. The colonel told us that the conductor had learned of our presence and that we would have to get out here.

We glared at foggy San Blas, its flat roofs dripping dismally in the early dawn, its thick, tropic vegetation heavy with the weight of moisture. But there was nothing for it but to bundle up our blankets and get off.

III

We lay over behind the bushes by the side of the tracks, keeping an eye on the conductor and brakeman. For the fourth time we reconnoitred the train. No place to board! We went back and lay down in the bushes near the engine.

We watched the fireman loading wood into the tender. "It must be some job to keep those engines fired up," I conjectured.

"Why not ask the fireman to let us feed the fire-box?" suggested Ralph.

The fireman more than welcomed our proposal. "Climb into the tender and wait until the train starts."

The conductor was furious when he learned of the arrangement. He had kicked us off back at Cajeme twenty-four hours before, and here we still were. This time he was determined to get rid of us. But we perched near the water tank of

the tender and refused to budge. Thereupon the conductor enlisted the backing of the engineer. The engineer had no interest in who did the firing, but evidently wanted to keep on good terms with the conductor. He ordered us to be gone. Ruefully we climbed down.

The only hope left was a stock car, in which was a blooded horse. We imagined it must belong to the colonel. But both doors of the stock car were officially closed with lead seals. One of the trainmen came up to the end of the car, unbolted a little end door and poured water into a wooden tub inside. He locked the door carefully behind him.

The coast clear, we went boldly up and broke the lead seal. Crawling inside, we closed the door behind us. I slipped my hand through the slats and twisted the broken seal into place.

The floor was bedded with straw, and three bales of hay lay at one end of the car. We made a barricade of these and the wooden tub and lay down flat on our stomachs, fairly well concealed.

The train pulled out without our being detected. The first stop after San Blas, Algodón (Cotton), was fairly distant, not reached until about ten o'clock. While the train halted here, the conductor stopped to talk with the station-agent right in front of our car, not two yards from us. We lay sprawled on our faces, expecting to be detected any moment. But presently both went on without even looking our way. We breathed more easily. The train pulled out again. Another long run through barren, monotonous country to Naranjo. Just before reaching this last station, the conductor came down between the two cars, opened the small end door, and glanced in.

He turned yellow with rage. "You two *diablos* still here? I put you off in Cajeme two days ago. Who said you could come in here?"

"The colonel," I lied.

He snorted, slammed the door, and went away. We expected the train to be halted at once. But it rattled on. Perhaps the flabbergasted conductor had decided we really were two devils, and beyond his power to dislodge us.

But at Naranjo we discovered why he had been so lenient. The train began switching, and soon our car was given a hearty bump that sent it rolling down a long siding. Our carriage *de luxe* would go no farther. The horse was evidently billed for Naranjo and didn't belong to the colonel at all. We laughed at my lie.

The trainmen had waited until the last moment to shove the car on the siding. The train proper was now far ahead. We hot-footed it down the track, fearing to be left behind. To make matters worse, my brother had left his dark glasses on one of the bales of hay and had to run back for them. When we finally reached the train, the engine had been recoupled and was letting off steam with a series of preliminary chugs and hisses. To our dismay every member of the crew was lined up on either side of the track to make sure we didn't board again. Not a ghost of a show!

"I have it!" I dashed into the station. Ripping two sheets from my note-book, I came running out again, waving them excitedly in my hand. What member of the crew could fail to see that I had bought two tickets?

Nonchalantly we swung aboard a third-class coach and settled down on one of the wooden benches among the tatterdemalion passengers.

Slowly the train gathered momentum. The station slid past. We waved a last good-bye to our ex-travelling companion, the horse. The train plunged from the llano into thick, tropical jungles.

Not for half an hour did the passenger-conductor (not the conductor who had ejected us) come around. I dug in my

shirt pocket for my imaginary tickets. My hand came away empty. I made a leisurely search through my clothes. I pretended alarm. I searched violently, with shaking fingers. The conductor waited impatiently. A third, more prolonged search. Then I told Ralph to look through his clothes. Then I searched mine again. "Where can they have gone?" I demanded of the lowering conductor. "They were two tickets, two tickets to Culiacán."

"Take another look," grumbled the conductor. "I'll come around a little later."

Not so bad! Every minute gained, the train covered a most respectable number of ties.

Ten minutes later the conductor was back. My hands flowed out in a gesture of despair. "What shall we do? We have lost our tickets, and we have no more money, not a cent."

"Get out at the next station," he snapped.

At the next station the crew was again lined up on both sides of the train. We hadn't a smell of a chance to get aboard.

We stood in the middle of the tracks forlornly watching the last car disappear into the thick, tropic vegetation. Culiacán was a good hundred miles away and no train for two days.

CHAPTER XXI

COUNTING TIES TO CULIACAN

I

WE followed the winding *camino real* through the jungle, through fields of sugar-cane, corn, tobacco, past picturesque adobe, tiled and thatched, houses, smothered in vines.

By nightfall we reached a beautiful, tangled little village and received hospitality at a large house surrounded by immense plum-, walnut-, and guayaba-trees. The yard was scrupulously swept, partly paved with brick, and walls of the house were neatly calcimined a pale pink. We sat out on a large porch, helping the family to shell corn, and afterwards ate a supper of beans, *tortillas*, cheese, and coffee. The woman spread us out some *petates*, or straw mats, on the brick-inlaid floor of the porch and rolled some cloths about wooden blocks for pillows.

Early the next morning the man of the house, handsome save for a paralyzed left arm, proudly took us around his dew-drenched garden, pointing out the fruit, the vegetables and herbs, the birds. He was very talkative, and, to break away, I asked him the time. Proudly he pulled out his gold watch — a possession few of the natives can afford, but though he pretended to consult it, he squinted at the sun and told me it was eight forty-five, when in reality it was eighty-three.

We insisted we had to be going on; so he told the women to provide us with a lunch of *tortillas* and cheese and sent

his twelve-year-old boy to accompany us for about half a mile, until we reached the main road south.

It followed fairly close to the tracks, and sometimes we walked ties instead of keeping to the road, hoping to jump a freight, or the regular train the following day. That noon we raided a cornfield and toasted the ripe ears, and with the *tortillas* and cheese made an excellent meal. About three o'clock, a mile from a station, a freight did overtake us. We raced down the tracks after it. But three men on the rear balcony of the caboose waved a vigorous negative at us; the train roared by the station without stopping.

That night we walked the ties into another town on a river bank, overtaking a jovial Indian, bent under a load of branches thickly beaded with small green peppers. We chatted. He commented on the birds and trees and hummed a Mexican popular air, *Cucaracha*, that rollicking Rabelaisian song, known all over the country.

We calmly invited ourselves to his house. His joviality vanished. "I am very poor," he protested. "Others in the village are much richer."

But we tagged after him. He had a beautiful, stoutly built, adobe house, set in a garden of enormous quince-, plum-, walnut-, and banana-trees. His back yard sloped down to the river bank where grew three patriarchal fig-trees. A long boat, hollowed out of a single log, floated at rest. He introduced us to his wife and his sister-in-law, both buxom Indian women, cow-like and docile.

We were not invited to supper, but the sister-in-law brought us *tortillas* and coffee under the *ramada*, and the man indicated a place for us to sleep on some mats.

The next morning they bade us adieu quite curtly, sending us on our way with blessings and no breakfast, so that we had to beg something to eat farther along in the town. We usually could tell where food was being prepared by the pat-a-pat-

plant

pat of *tortillas* in the making. How we came to love that sound!

Nearing a small stream that cut sharply down from the mountains, we hurried to take off our clothes; we had tramped for days now without taking a bath. But the section hands working on the railroad bridge above, came running toward us in great alarm, waving their arms and shouting: "*Caimanes, caimanes*" — "Alligators, alligators."

Peering intently into the sluggish stream, we caught a glimpse of the undulation of a huge green tail and a slow shadow sinking out of sight. One of the workmen said that sometimes even horses were dragged down by the reptiles.

But the following day in the Mecarito River, near Guamuchil, we found women bathing and washing clothes. Here they assured us the water was quite safe, because of a dam below. So we bathed and washed our clothes, sunning ourselves on the sands while they dried.

II

In Guamuchil we ran into an American by the name of Andrews. He promptly invited us out to his house and insisted on our staying with him until Ralph's eyes, which were mattering badly, became better. He gave Ralph a medicine to apply, telling him that it would cure them in about three days, for he himself often suffered the same way — a result of the heat and excessive light.

In return we helped him bring in corn shucks for fodder and stack hay for the approaching dry, winter season.

Andrews had come to Guamuchil, married a native woman, opened a store, and became prosperous, one of the pillars of the community. Every year he made large amounts of money by buying and storing corn till the high prices came along. Both he and his Mexican wife were kindly people,



ACROSS COUNTRY



WAYSIDE VILLAGE

most hospitable to us. We stayed with them three days, and even then they were loathe to have us go.

My *huaraches* were now in bad shape. Getting them wet on several occasions had caused the uncured hide of which they were made to stretch and lose shape, so that now I had hard work fixing them on my feet. Too, the soles had become thin as tissue-paper, and often sharp cactus thorns set me dancing on one foot. Shortly they wore holes so I discarded them entirely and proceeded barefoot.

From here on, the country became more and more tropical. In some places the road swung away from the railway and entered into the dense jungle. Scarlet and blue and yellow flowers tumbled riotously from branch to branch. The air was sultry, heavy with strong perfume and a humidity that made our garments cling to us stickily and sucked the pep completely out of us.

Once we fell in with a band of *vaqueros*, clad in tight leather trousers and leather jackets, with wide picturesque sombreros, decorated with horse-hair bands. They walked their ponies alongside of us for several miles, questioning us curiously about that far-away wondrous city called New York — did it really exist and did it have buildings that reached to the sky?

We told them about the Woolworth building, about elevators that shot from floor to floor. They nodded politely, but cast incredulous glances from one to another. They left us shortly, convinced that we had been spoofing them — yet not wishing to display either their doubt of us or their own ignorance.

III

The road popped out of the jungle near a wavering line of weed-grown railroad tracks. Here half a dozen thatched *jacales* hunched together in a dreary hollow. It was late in the

afternoon, but the day was still oppressively hot and muggy. For two days we had had nothing to eat.

We dragged listlessly over to the most imposing *jacal* and, in the rear, begged a meal from an Indian woman washing clothes on a trough-like stone. Her black eyes apprised us cunningly.

"Any money?" she asked.

Our negative elicited a shrug of her massive, peasant shoulders. Busily she kept on slapping and rubbing her wet clothes. We asked her questions about the country-side, the roads, the people, her neighbours, her two children, playing on the dirt floor under the rear *ramada*. They were caressing dolls made from corn husks, and singing a plaintive little song about El Nahual, the fearsome night creature who frightens children.

*Ay mamá! Por aquí pasó el Nahual
Con sus alas de petate,
Con sus ojos de nixtamal.*

O Mamma! Here passed the Nahual
With his wings of straw,
With his eyes of dough.

The Indian woman gradually thawed. Noticing the round outline of the compass in my shirt pocket, she touched it, saying: "And is this not money?"

I showed it to her. She turned it about in her hand, watching the tiny tremulous needle fascinatedly. "What is it?"

"This. Oh, a charm. A charm for telling fortunes."

"You will tell my fortune?"

So we struck a bargain:

One fortune = meals for two.

Chatting with her while she ground up maize on the

metate for making *tortillas*, I gained considerable preliminary information about her husband and her two children playing beside us.

She gave us an excellent meal: omelet *á la español*, *tortillas*, *garbanzos*, fruit, coffee.

I could do no less than give her an excellent horoscope.

Gazing solemnly and necromantically at the compass, I conjured up all the genii of my imagination and informed her dramatically that some day, not far distant, her husband, when returning home from work, would find a purse of gold, enough gold to buy a little ranch. She would have another son, a very handsome and bright child, a little prince. I waved my hands before her eyes, saying that all three children would go to school and become very wise and prosperous and *distinguidos*. One would be a business man and own a store in Culiacán and would be kind to all poor people; another would become a priest and absolve the sins of the heavy-hearted; and the third, the son still unborn, would become a great general and would protect the oppressed and some day become president of Mexico. In glowing colours I pictured the little ranch, their happy life, her children playing in the yard, the honours she would achieve through her children. She listened rapturously, convinced, poor soul, of the gospel truth of every syllable.

She begged me to leave her the compass as an amulet. I assured her that if I parted with it I should die, and that would bring bad luck, so that nothing I had told her would then come true.

She nodded understandingly and watched Ralph and me out of sight down the road, an amazed and beatific light upon her simple, bronze face — for had she not gazed full upon the dazzling countenance of the future?

From that day on I often told fortunes for meals, and, though penniless, Ralph and I lived for a time off the fat of

the land. As I recall the faces of the housewives, mystified and thrilled by my crazy tales, I still wonder who conferred the greater boon, they with their meals or I with my prognostications. Their meals saved our bodies; the fortunes I told them gave them romance and dreams and years of talk and speculation.

IV

Some miles this side of Culiacán, the capital of the State of Sinaloa, we fell in with a troupe of musicians going into town to play at a wedding. In Mexico nearly all the birds and all of the people sing. This was a particularly jolly lot, a bizarre outfit, ranging from individuals in white cotton pyjamas to an uncomfortable specimen in a shrunken, store suit and an amazingly high stiff collar. When tired, they would sit on the railroad embankment to smoke and chat and play. Their flaring, eerie music rose to the arches formed by the tall trees and massed vines, then flowed back to us slowly and tremulously, with a thousand tiny echos. With the exception of a slide trombone and a French horn, their instruments were home-made, hand-wrought guitars and violins, a syrinx, and a flute. Now and then they accompanied their instruments with full-throated voices. The chap in the shrunken store suit sang till the buttons burst on his vest. He claimed that his song, which he entuned with so much verve and pathos, had been written by the famous Indian king of the Texcocans, Nezhucoyotl:

When I die, mother,
Bury me under the warm hearthstone
And weep for your son,
Who was beautiful and strong,
Making all your days glad.

But when the neighbours come
 To ask you why you weep,
Pués, tell them the logs you burn
 Are green and make much smoke
 That fills your eyes with tears.

Everybody sings in Mexico; and if God has not been over-generous with each vocal instrument, He has been more than generous in His bestowal of simple, warm emotions. The *amante* serenades the balcony of his sweetheart; the truck drivers sing resonantly in street and alley; the pedlars have distinct tunes for each ware; the coffin makers hum over their adzes, the beggars — the “For-God’s-sake-ers,” as they say in Mexico — murmur dolorously to passers-by: “God will repay your generosity.” On birthdays and feasts, the friends and guests begin singing at the windows of the celebrant in the early morning hours — sweet carols that spring out of the still night to the ears of sleepless ones. Or it may be a love-song, filled with tenderness and sweetness, of a race tormented with the “evil of love.” These *mañanitas* are simple, heartfelt:

Does the *sereno* (night-watchman) of this street
 Care to do me a favour? —
 Then put out the light of your lantern
 While my true love goes. —

Ten thousand thanks, Señor Sereno,
 Ten thousand thanks, for your favour.
 Light your lantern once more, —
 My true love has gone.

At birthdays these *mañanitas* are sung at intervals from midnight to breakfast time; they are sisters of the old Pro-

vençal madrigal. From cool, flower-filled *patio* after *patio* drifts out at all hours of the day into the sun-gold streets the echoes of sad, lingering melodies of native sorrow. There are marimbas and violins and guitars and full-throated baritone voices; there are dancing, wedding, and funeral songs — there are child songs and love-songs and old battle songs and rodeo songs; there are May songs and harvest songs that hark back to the great Dionysus, and tunes to invoke spirits, and frighten spirits; and at every turn of the *camino real*, on a hundred highways of the land, there is the *corrido* or story song, full of legend and folklore and magic and exploits of national heroes: Villa, Zapata, El Zarco, of the tragic Marbella, done to death by a jealous mother-in-law; of Llorona, the crying one, the betrayed bed-companion of Cortés, the wailing betider of death.

Few of these tunes are gay except the *mañanitas*, though many of them are slyly humorous, or bitingly malicious. They reflect the national temperament; tragic sorrow and longing, counter-balanced with fierce independence; desperate fatalism set off against absurd recklessness; dreamy languor whirled into magnificent passion; a humbleness as lovely as the woven *petates* on which the Mexican sleeps, yet a magnificent love of life; dark brooding pierced by the sudden flame of love and laughter. But sad or gay, living or dying, the Mexican sings.

CHAPTER XXII

SELLING POSTCARDS

I

WE filed across the high-spanned railroad bridge into Culiacán, a compact town, massed with tiled roofs and trees. After saying good-bye to the musicians, who solemnly shook hands one and all and invited us to the wedding, we wandered around the town, up one narrow, slanting street and down another, through the market, along the river, past barracks and a fruit stand. The vender nodded to us cheerily, his eyes twinkling with a spirit of general fraternity towards the universe and its beings. He struck up our acquaintance with a loose, jolly remark that raised a laugh from the soldiers idling about. For some reason he took a liking to us, and, enthusiastically seizing my battered straw hat off my head, he heaped it with oranges.

We sat down in the plaza. An American Negro, his toes peeking out from his shoes, but on the whole better dressed than ourselves, struck up a conversation. His particular grievance was against the American consul in Mazatlán, whom he had "hit for a hard-boy," but had been turned down.

"Ah asks you, as two good frien's, confidential-like," he went on, "what in Gawd's name an Ame'can consul's fo' if he cawn't help an honest colo'd gen'man f'om Alabama. He wan' a give me a job, but ah tells him, ah does, that ah's pa'ticula', suh, who ah wo'ks fo', ah is." —

Down a side street we passed a tannery. Workmen were slopping hides with a vivid red liquid and scraping them on huge, flat stone slabs. We watched them idly for a few minutes, then found a way to *aprovechar* from the industry; we asked the proprietor for some leather, and he kindly gave us a stout piece from among his odds and ends, it suddenly having occurred to us that we make a pair of native sandals, or *huaraches*.

On our way down toward the river bank we pried loose some barbed wire from a fence, thinking it might prove useful. Finding a shady spot at the water's edge, we began our cobbling. The wire, a nail, my knife, and the rocks on the shore were our tools. First we cut thongs from the edge of the leather; then we scratched the outlines of both feet on it and cut out the soles. After hammering the barbs out of the wire, we broke it into three-inch bits, which we bent into hooks and inserted into holes made at the edges of the soles with a nail. Thus we had stout, wire loops into which to tie the thongs. One thong went over the toes; another, fastened on either side of the heel, ran over the instep. Years later I discovered the curious fact that the Japanese sandal is called *waraji*, which, when pronounced, sounds very much like *huarache*.

Tied to the bank a few rods away floated a boat carved out of a single log. In it a bronzed fisherman, leaning on a long pole and standing on one leg like a flamingo, stared into space. About his loins was wrapped a dirty cloth; the muscles of his weather-beaten chest were bunched into powerful knots.

While we were working, a boy came down with a big stack of *tortillas* stuffed with pepper and meat. It was noontime, and a goodwife in one of the palm-thatched cabins on the bluff above had evidently watched our labours and acted the good Samaritan by sending down part of her meal.

II

That afternoon we ran into the superintendent of the local light company, an American, James Langdon by name, a short, stocky man, gentle in manner, yet with a cruel droop to his eyes — an impression of a dual personality, attractive and repellent at one and the same time. He invited us to his house to stay for several days.

There he introduced us to his wife, Josefina, a spritely little mestiza, dressed in fluffy pinks, who acted the part of *la gran señora*, managed his house, and ran an electric machine for grinding corn into *masa* for *tortillas* for the neighbouring housewives, a service for which she charged five centavos, but saved them the back-breaking labour of mashing the corn on the stone metates.

Langdon had no regular employment for us, but let us unload several cars of wood at the rate of twenty-five centavos an hour.

Josefina soon became very good to us, mending our clothes and doing other little services. One morning, after Langdon had left for the plant, she insisted on my trying a special dish. A day or so later when my brother had gone down to the market, she sat down beside me at the breakfast table to ask me whether I liked Mexican girls.

I admitted that they had their points.

She mentioned a friend of hers who came to the house every day. "Don't you think she's pretty?"

"Yes, very, though she can't hold a candle to you."

Josefina's round olive face flushed rosily. She arched her graceful neck.

"Why do you talk of going so soon?" she asked me.

"We can't stay here; we must go on."

"I know, you will go to Mexico City and forget all about us here in Culiacán. And what will you do in Mexico City?"

I shrugged. "Blessed if I know."

"Mexico City is beautiful, they say. I wish I could see it. — You don't know what you will do there? — It doesn't matter. You will find something, something worthy of you. You'll be successful. All you Americans are successful."

"You are very kind to predict such good fortune. If the gods will it ——"

"How I should love to go to Mexico City, to get away from here!" She made patterns on the cloth with the end of a spoon. A pathetic look clouded her large black eyes. Slowly she turned them upon me. "You will be successful and you'll want a wife."

This was too subtle for me. "Perhaps, perhaps not."

"Will you marry a Mexican girl?"

"I could do worse, perhaps."

"Do you really think I'm pretty?" She toyed with a diamond ring on her finger.

"Very."

"You will go to Mexico City and you must remember me then, you must. But you won't." She looked around her apprehensively, clenched her hand, leaned towards me, pouring out her words in a hot torrent.

"Langdon is a brute, an utter brute. He seems so kind and generous, but he's a brute. I hate him! hate him! hate him!" Her little fist pounded on the table. "I must get away from him. He's a brute." She was panting, almost hissing her words now. "Help me after you get to Mexico City. Send for me when you get there. I'll do anything to repay you, anything in the world you ask. I'll be your servant, your slave — anything you ask. Only don't let me remain here." Her tense hand clutched my sleeve. Suddenly she flung her arms about me and began sobbing.

"She's crazy," I thought, alarmed.

"Anything, anything," she sobbed. "Your slave, your

slave for life. You must send for me — you." Her hair tumbled down, stinging my face like hot wire. Her wet cheek pressed against mine. The fire of her round young body ran through me.

A noise!

We both sprang back. With the lithe agility of a pantheress she leaped to the table and began clearing up the dirty dishes with a great clatter.

Langdon stalked in with his usual heavy tread.

"Forgot my pipe," he growled and rummaged in his coat hanging on the back of the door.

I made an excuse to go out with him, giving Josefina a significant glance. I wanted to get into the air, to think how best to handle the situation.

III

To stay longer at Langdon's would be treacherous. I skirmished through the town and found an Indian *jacal* where Ralph and I could sleep for ten centavos a night. We went up to Langdon's to get our blankets. Fortunately Josefina had gone to market. We would pay our respect to her and Langdon later in the day. —

An old seed catalogue I had found suggested to me a scheme for making a few pesos. With the money from the unloading of the cars, we invested in red ink, glue, black paint, and postcards of the Virgin of Guadalupe, Mexico's most famous and popular Virgin, patroness of the war for independence. From bushes near the river we cut stout stalks, which we sliced into slender sticks of appropriate lengths. These we polished with sand, painted, and glued together to make frames for postcards, which we had previously mounted on cardboard mats. Around the edges of this matting, we pasted bright-colored flowers cut from the illus-

trated seed catalogue and wrote little mottoes in fancy red letters. "*Recuerdo de Culiacán. . . La Santísima Virgen de Guadalupe bendiga á los Pobres y Perdone á los Pecadores.*" These fantastic ensembles we peddled at fifty centavos each.

To sell the finished product we fell in with a professional singer of *corridos*, who went about the town selling little songs printed on coarse, luridly dyed strips of spongy paper with ornate, bizarre illustrations — two for a centavo. These were displayed on a straw *petate* spread on the cobble-stones at conspicuous corners. This *cantador* accompanied himself on a home-made guitar, in a hoarse, wailing voice, pathetically staring up at the heavens with white, sightless eyes, set in a blunt pock-marked face. His daughter, a girl of fifteen, ragged, barefoot, came in on the choruses with quavering, adolescent shrillness, sold the *corridos* and collected coarse jokes and centavos. No sooner would the two strike up a song than they would be surrounded by an entranced, witty group of pyjama-clad Indians.

By hanging on to the outskirts of the little throng, we managed to sell a goodly number of our home-made pictures. The blind *cantador* was more than gratified by the ten centavos that we gave him at the close of each day. In a few days we had accumulated a nest-egg of over twenty pesos and our seed catalogue was a heap of scraggly scraps of paper. As to our contribution to the art of interior decoration of Culiacán and the advancement of Christianity — not so bad! Doubtless even now, these seven years later, some of the adobe walls of the town are still adorned with the faded pictures of the Virgin of Guadalupe enthroned over the coloured flowers of a New Jersey seed catalogue and framed in black sticks, beneath which float-lamps burn in holy reverence and lowly folk chant their honest praises and sorrows to the most lovely saviour of the Mexican land.



BIRDSELLER



THE MARKET

IV

We were rich now; we had twenty pesos. But we were still æons away from Mexico City, over on the west coast, the high Sierras and central plateau between. But we were still determined to get there. We debated our next step.

Should we go down toward the west coast and work a corner of a coffee plantation on shares, and thus get enough money to travel with some comfort (this might mean a delay of a year), or should we set out directly, going along the coast south to Mazatlán or cross the Sierras immediately to Durango in the central plateau?

We consulted our map. Durango was gone, bit out by Prince back near Gila Bend. We traced the other route. Reaching Mazatlán would be but the beginning of the problem, for from there we should have to cross the terrible mountains of Tepic on foot, and the mountain region of Tepic inhabited by Huicholes, a fierce, untamed tribe of Indians that has led in every important rebellion against the Spaniards and the central government. The Tiger of Alicia, one of the fiercest Indian leaders of the last century, came out of Tepic with the slogan to restore the ancient empire of Montezuma and exterminate every white man the length and breadth of Mexico. Tepic to this day is honeycombed with bandits, who rob and kill without mercy anyone who falls into their clutches. No, we did not fancy crossing Tepic. Of course we could take a boat to Manzanilla, but where was our assurance that we could scrape together the necessary fare?

So we asked several people about the route across the Sierras from Culiacán to Durango. Everybody warned us off. Though the country was settled by Mayos and Tarahumaras, both noted for their kindness, nevertheless these

Indians were suspicious of outsiders. Besides, the mountains are precipitous — stark cliffs, deep *barrancas*, little water. Ranches are few, wild animals abound — lions, tigers, and wolves prey upon the unwary traveller. The Durango route was not encouraging, yet it seemed more feasible than the Tepic route. We decided to tackle it, map or no map.

At the market we bought soap and hunting-knife and were just setting out, after an unsuccessful search for a new map, when we ran into Langdon. He was alarmed to learn that we were going to cross the mountains.

“Don’t do it,” he counselled. “It’s freezing cold up there now, and dangerous. Stay where there are civilized people. Go on to Mazatlán, and then by boat to Manzanilla. But don’t go on foot across the Sierras. You’ll get lost.”

He saw us hesitate, and then urged: “Anyway come to the house to-night and talk it over.”

We agreed, assuring him, however, that we had definitely decided to leave early the following morning.

That night he argued with us for a long time, recounting many hair-raising tragedies. For myself I was not alarmed, but his tales did give concern about my brother, who, being seven years younger than I, was terribly worn out by the hardship we had already endured. I mentioned my fears to Ralph, who naturally pooh-poohed them.

“Why not let him stay here with me?” suggested Langdon. “I can give him odd jobs and his meals. He can run the grinding machines for Josefina.”

At first Ralph refused to listen, but he was terribly played out, and wisdom finally won. It was decided that Ralph should follow me as soon as it became feasible and after I had learned just what the difficulties might be.

While we were talking, Josefina moved about us, preparing supper. Several times, quite purposely, she brushed close to me; her fluffy, pink garments caressed my face.

I avoided her eyes, but once, glancing up, I caught their swift gleam, half angry, half pleading.

Langdon went out with Ralph into the room of the grinding machines to explain their workings.

I seized Josefina's arm, speaking rapidly *sotto voce*.

"I know nothing of the future. Even if I did I could promise you nothing."

She clutched at me convulsively. "I know, I know. But you must remember me and help me to get away. As one human being to another you must do that. Langdon — he's a brute. He's only good to outsiders. To me he's a brute. Look!" She pulled her dress away from her bosom, showing me a long, ugly scar. "He did that. He gets drunk and brings in other women and carouses with them and even makes me stay in the same room."

She choked and covered her face with her hands. "If you don't do something for me, I'll kill myself." Her words tumbled out. "He's a beast. I have to escape. And you know how hard it is for a Mexican woman without relatives. She has no employment to turn to. She is a slave. And I could never live with a Mexican man now. Listen! Your brother will stay here. He will write you. You will write him. Remember me. Tell me how you get along. When you send for him, send for me. I will not trouble you there. I will not even see you if you don't wish it. Or I will scrub your floors. I'll do anything you say. Yes? Yes?"

Langdon's foot scraped the threshold. She fell back and hurriedly rattled the utensils on the stove.

That was the last chance she had to speak to me alone. But when I said good-bye to Langdon, she held out her hand warmly and said significantly: "You will write to us often."

Her fingers clung to mine spasmodically. I could feel the tremble of her body run down into their very tips.

CHAPTER XXIII

MOUNTAIN TROUBADOURS

I

I LEFT the lowlands, with their dense, tropical vegetation. The country became hilly and rolling. I was soon in the steep mountain ravines. Numerous *arrieros*, their mules and burros loaded down with charcoal, oranges, plums, pottery, matting, and other handiwork, jogged past on their way down to Culiacán. At each turn in the trail, in snug little valleys or on shoulders of hills, were groups of thatch-roofed houses. Occasionally whole settlements clustered about a cathedral — monument to the passing of the Spaniard. But that the old afflatus of religious energy had faded was evidenced by the cracked, weather-worn façades, the rotting benches, the rain-stained apses, the intrusion of Indian symbols, the decaying images, which in most cases scarcely retained the native conception of the original artist.

Ere long the *camino real* wound up through living stone, worn down several feet by the scraping of Indian *huaraches*, through countless centuries; then dropped into the Tamazula River. This stream winds down for two hundred miles between stark canyon walls to the lowlands of the Pacific. Early November was upon me; evidently there had been rains in the mountains, for the water in most places was fairly deep. I was told that in some years, when the mountain storms are violent, the water sweeps down, a great battering hulk thirty feet high, bellowing and smashing its way be-

tween its high walls, sweeping rock and houses and crops on its boiling tide and grinding them to chaff.

The trail ascended more or less in a straight line along the floor of the ravine, but the river meandered from wall to wall. I had to wade through the water, frequently up to my waist, even up to my arm-pits. I would plunge in, clamber across, feet slipping on the rolling stones, hoist myself on the opposite bank, shake my body like a Saint Bernard dog, and go on, relying on the warm sun and my own movements to dry me.

Shoes would have been a real handicap, for I should have had to remove them each time. But the *huaraches*, this time of well cured leather, could be left on. Even so, they caused me great discomfort, for when I came out upon the bank, the sand stuck to the thongs, which then rubbed my skin like emory paper. I tore strips of cloth from the end of my shirt and bound them around the straps. Though this eliminated some of the irritation, my feet in a day of so were covered with raw sores wherever they came in contact with the straps.

At every turn of the trail I encountered interesting sights and queer incidents. One night I met a funeral *cortège*. A weird spectacle of wavering, ocote torches. First came a black-robed priest in a cowl, pacing slowly, crucifix upraised devoutly in a frozen gesture; next, the coffin, borne on the shoulders of four husky Indians; then the long train of mourners. We stood aside to let them pass. They were chanting lugubriously, a long, eerie wail that seemed to shake the torch flames, then to rise on the Indian quarter-tones shriller and shriller, beating against the stone walls and rising on the wings of the moaning wind clear to the vivid stars, gleaming in the narrow strip of sky above. And then, as if exhausted, the chant would fall back into the full Gregorian interval, pure mood through which, like a bright thread, ran the tinkling sound of the waters over the stones. The mourners

walked with bowed heads, women in long skirts and black tápalos drawn tightly against their tear-damp cheeks, toddling children, an old patriarch, bent, stumbling; and last, as the train topped the ridge against the moon-bright sky, the silhouette of a mother followed by a child limping on a rude crutch. Far aloft on a crag was a wind-washed church, with a tall bell tower and cross notching the opaque sky, and the soft sweet sound of a tolling bell floated down into the canyon and drifted along the surface of the water, gone for ever.

The scene pricked some chord of memory, something strangely familiar, something seen before. But not until I re-read *Don Quixote*, some three years later, did I realize why this funeral procession had seemed thus a part of a previous experience. For in many ways it was the very counterpart of that procession described by Cervantes Saavedra which was attacked by the mad knight on his decrepit Rosinante.

II

The following day I fell in with a long train of *arrieros* from Culiacán, taking salt and other goods into the mountains. At every turn of the train the housewives would run out with red terra-cotta bowls to buy salt, which increased in price at every stop. I began to appreciate the significance of the famous salt taxes of ancient monarchies in the days when trade was limited and fraught with danger; salt, the most widely distributed compound on the face of the earth, one of man's prime necessities for health, nay for life, became on this trail a luxury as costly as caviar.

That night I camped with the *arrieros* around a huge fire under a hospitable *ramada*, a covered roof extending out from the front of a house. It is the custom of the mountain people in these parts to build fires every night under the

ramadas as a welcome to chance travellers — a picturesque sight, these fires, blazing all night long far up along the untamed canyons. The wild mountains overhanging us, black and sinister; the call of fierce creatures lurking near at hand in the dark; the rush and roar of the black waters of the river; the moan of the wind in the trees — all added their weird terrors, allayed only by the sense of comfort and safety from the dancing flames. The well-being and fellowship of people sitting around their living fires in their cooped-up city apartments are slight compared to those of these children of the vast outdoors, to whom the crimson fire, in contrast with the surrounding blackness and wilderness, is sensuously vivid and compelling. Probably, though, even our city emotions, stirred at the sight of glowing hearth, are but the timid reflex of the terror-inspired desire of our troglodyte ancestors for safety and comfort, an evocation of our inner race consciousness of the age-old hospitality and blessedness of the fire in the primeval forest. Ever since Prometheus wrenched the divine flame from Zeus for the benefit of mankind, the human race found itself set apart from the rest of animate nature, with a new peace and joy and self-assurance, by this protean instrument of survival and comfort. To me, out here in the heart of this strange, untamed country, amidst strange people, surrounded by the mystery and terror of the unknown, the beauty and security of this camp fire under the *ramada* rewoke in me the same echo of the overwhelming significance that it must have had for our first skin-clad forbears. The fire itself is a song of courage and fantasy and from the rhythm of its flames are born many of the songs of the people — out of the dancing fire, out of the melancholy, unruly music of the icy waters, the twinging clamour of glacial, upland winds, the strange calls and clamours of the unknown dark.

That night under the *ramada* — the lights from the other

houses gleaming through the dark all up and down the *caserío* — the talk and laughter and music of the *arrieros* mingled with the fire smoke and faded away into the blackness about.

One of the *arrieros*, accompanying himself on the guitar, chanted little songs, plaintive with beauty and love and the inevitable passing of both. Some of these songs were impromptu; others had been written deep in the soul of the race. When he tired, someone else of the group told stories, simple, emotional tales flavoured with the epic, or tinged with healthy, Rabelaisian joy. The burly chap who played the guitar wore a red sash about his big paunch, a blue sarape over his shoulders and a sombrero tilted back on his head, a shoe-string caught below his under lip. His thick, black hair hung down over his forehead in a wild tangle into his soft animal-like eyes.

He would break forth in a full bass mellowed by the open amphitheatre of the night:

Herons cry, herons fly,
Hark the thresh of wings
Through the purple sky,
Herons fly, herons cry,—

Herons cry, herons fly,
Proudly into the sky,
White against the green
Black against the sun,

Herons fly, herons cry —
I dance and run, dance and run!

III

One man told a story of his grandfather, who had been an *arriero*, but "before the days of trains and Fords and telephones and all these modern things." In those days his grandfather lashed his mules, loaded with fabulous treasure for the Spanish king, from the famous silver mines of Guanajuato clear down to the seaport of Vera Cruz. One night the muleteers were granted hospitality in the outbuildings of a convent of Our Sacred Heart of Jesus, near the port. The Mother Superior very graciously asked the muleteers to take as a gift to another convent of the same order near Guanajuato a parrot much beloved by the nuns because it could "recite sermons and hymns and the Ave Maria and many other things holy and beautiful." All the way up the steep trail to the central plateau and the beautiful mountain-perched town of Guanajuato the parrot rode gaily on the back of the lead mule, giving earnest ear to every choice curse of the *arrieros* as they beat their animals.

The living gift was duly delivered, and the Mother Superior and the nuns of the Guanajuato convent were more enchanted with the pious bird than those who sent it, for it soon showed its "divine knowledge of hymns and sermons and many sacred tidbits." Accordingly the parrot was honoured at vespers with a place in the pulpit. The nuns filed in, downcast eyes, breast-folded hands, white gowns rustling in the dim, holy chapel. Suddenly a voice broke the calm silence: "Dirty she-mules, *Ay va!* Keep to the trail! Hit the grade. *Ay!* Step along, you blankety blank ———— *Ay va!*"

This tirade of curses was drowned out in the horrified shrieks of the nuns. The Mother Superior and her flock pursued the parrot wildly, gowns ruffled, full sleeves flap-

ping, all about the dim interior. The bird was finally caught. The nuns were all for wringing its neck on the spot, but the Mother Superior chided such hasty rancour and insisted that instead the bird be turned over to the Holy Inquisition, then sitting in high tribunal in Mexico City. This was done; the offending bird was duly tried for blasphemy and heresy, and sentenced to burn alive in a slow fire.

Another *arriero* told of a bell that had been tried by the Holy Inquisition of Spain. This bell originally hung in a small church in a town near Santander. At six o'clock every night it would begin ringing, but no one knew why or how, as no human hand touched the cord. This bell had the most silver tones of any bell known, and the people were very loath to believe anything improper of it. But night after night they set watch and saw it ring without intervention of any human hand. Reluctantly they were forced to believe that the bell was bewitched. It was taken down and sent with an account of what had happened to the nearest Inquisition tribunal. After lengthy discussion it was decided to melt the bell down into metal, but, as it was such a beautiful-sounding bell, at the last moment the Inquisition relented and banished it from Spain. The sentence of banishment was duly enforced, and in due time the bell arrived in Mexico, where it was hung in the Plaza Constitucional — and there it hangs to this day.

These tales called forth the story of Saint Anthony. One day Saint Anthony was standing naked on the shore of a river, ready to take a swim. The Lord sought to test his virtue by sending two beautiful damsels along the bank. Saint Anthony, terrified at the proximity of sin, precipitately backed off. Seizing up his straw hat, which was lying atop his pile of clothes, he held it in front of him in lieu of a loin-cloth. He continued to back off, but stepped upon a cactus. One of the sharp thorns pierced his heel. Uttering a loud

cry of anguish, he flung up his hands. But the Lord, in view of Saint Anthony's earnest desire not to sin, performed a miracle. The hat did not fall!

The bass voice struck up again — a song about Juanita:

Under your window I played my guitar,
I sang of true love, to you, my star,
My Juanita, my Juanita.
But you scorn my love, you scorn my song —
Do you think dreams last, that life is so long?
My Juanita, my Juanita?

There's Rosa and Margarita, and others too,
Adios, Juanita, my love so true, so true,
My Juanita, my Juanita.
A kiss from Rosa, from Concha a flower,
From Margarita an hour, an hour,
My Juanita, my Juanita.

Are you weeping, beloved, at my tale?
You love me? Mine without fail?
My Juanita, my Juanita?
Pués, adios, my Juanita, farewell, I say —
Nor pick up the old shoe I threw away.
Adios, Juanita, my Juanita,

Adios!

It was late when we curled up around the fire. The following morning I said good-bye to the *arrieros*; our ways parted.

CHAPTER XXIV

A MEDICINE WOMAN

I

ONE twilight, when I was pushing on anxiously to a village in order not to have to sleep in the open and run the danger of attack by wild beasts, I reached a place where the rocky walls of the ravine made a natural chapel. In a niche of rock stood a black cross with a white Christ, bent head crowned with a gilt chaplet of thorns, skin stained with long, bloody streaks. Before it, knelt a lone Indian, arms outstretched, body inclined, face suffused with appeal and hope.

I stood behind him for quite some time. So enraptured was he that he failed to notice me at all. A lion could have swallowed him alive.

I finally broke his trance. "Where, pray tell, is the village?"

He replied in a gentle voice. "Six kilometres further on."

"Do you belong to the village?"

He crossed his bony hands respectfully over his white blouse. "*Si, señor.*"

"Why, then, are you out here so late where the wild beasts may harm you? Is there no Christ in your village? Why don't you pray to him?"

"Ah, *señor*, the Christ in the village is always busy. He has so much to do. Everybody asks him to do things. And who am I? Nobody, nobody." A lugubrious shake of his head. "Do you think the great Christ in the village would

remember what I ask? But this Christ is lonely. He is humble like myself. He has more time to listen to me, to do what I ask."

The Indian indicated to me a short cut to the village, which I never reached, for I missed the way.

For two days and two nights I wandered about looking for a trail. Exhausted, without food or water, late the third afternoon, I stumbled down into a little canyon, where a spring gurgled up from among the ferns. Here I came upon an Indian hut set against a gigantic pine-tree. The owner, an aged, snow-haired Indian, suspicious at first, was glad to see me. He thumped around with his staff, getting me something to eat. He brought forth a large olla, half filled with water, from which he fished out pieces of calabash — surprisingly succulent. I ate ravenously.

All the next day I could not move. I was attacked by fevers and chill, the aftermath of getting my feet wet from the fording of the Tamazula, for the sun disappears from the steep ravines very early, and I had walked for hours in the lingering twilight, clothes dripping, my body icy. And though I usually came to a good fire under the *ramada* of some mountain hut, often I had difficulty in getting properly dried. Frequent sleeping in wet clothes caused rheumatic pains. These pains, plus the fever and chills, made me utterly miserable. One moment I would be burning, the next moment my teeth chattering — perhaps the hold-over of malaria from the vicious *Anopheles* mosquitoes of the lowlands.

The aged Indian was very kind. He pasted little heart-shaped leaves on my temples and gave me hot tea, assuring me that on the morrow I would be "*perfectamente bien, perfectamente bien.*" Strangely enough the next day I did feel "perfectly well"; not a trace of ague or pain.

The old fellow entertained me with legends about the origin of the spring gushing at the foot of his hut.

One day the wife of one of the gods was crossing the mountains when she met a handsome stranger. This was none other than the enemy-god of her husband who had taken on a most deboniar and entrancing form. And here in this hollow of fern and trees she had succumbed to his flattery and beauty and had sinned. Her husband surprised them. Maddened with jealousy, he drove off the other god and killed his wife.

Pointing down the ravine, the Indian showed me two white granite columns making a natural gate. "There," he said, "you can see her toes sticking up. The spring bubbles from her navel; and there above, where you see the cleft in the hills, is where her husband struck her with a machete, cleaving her skull. Her hair turned into beautiful ferns, and these two knolls, the one on which my hut stands and that one there, were her breasts. In the old days, every year, we held a big festival and drank *tevesino* and sacrificed a lovely virgin to the spirit in the spring — to quiet the remorseful *alma* of the dead woman; for should she stir, the earth would quake and the sun darken."

The next day he limped along with me up to where the cleft skull of the adulterous wife of the god leads on to a new ravine.

"Follow this down," he advised, "and you will come again upon the Tamazula."

When I had bade him farewell, he climbed to the top of a huge boulder that shouldered out above the bushes, to watch me descend. His tall staff was clutched in his gnarled hand, his white hair blown by the breeze — a patriarchal figure. But to my final wave of the hand he vouchsafed no responding gesture.



A L O S T G O D



S T O N E S N A K E S O F T E O T I H U A C Á N

II

I regained the river late that afternoon and spent the rest of the day bathing and washing my clothes in a big pool behind a boulder.

That night I set fire to a huge, dead log and spread my blankets beside the pool. The north pole could not have been colder. The damp from the water crawled through my very bones. Roll up as tightly as I would and get as close to the fire as I could, there was no way of shutting out the damp chill. I dozed fitfully. Once, waking up suddenly, I was frightened to find my blanket on fire. I jumped free and stamped on it. The woollen cloth smouldered stubbornly, but I finally got the last spark extinguished. The blanket looked as though it had been gnawed into by huge moths.

The following night, soaked to the skin from fording the river, I stumbled into a circle of houses perched on a ledge above the bank. Unfortunately there was no fire, but the Indian woman was very hospitable. She took the white scarf from about her head, spread it out on a box for a table-cloth and fed me an unconscionable number of *tortillas*. Her husband did not come in till long after dark. His plot of ground was stuck way up on the crest of the mountain; it took him several hours to go and come and the patch was so steep that the former owner had fallen off into the valley below and been killed. Often, when passing up the ravine, I had seen these checkerboard patches of yellowing corn against the very sky and marvelled at the length to which these Indians resorted to earn a living and maintain their independence.

I felt and looked miserable, and the man of the house suggested that I sleep on a home-made cot strung with rawhide, the price of which would be twenty-five centavos. I had

a few centavos, but, in spite of my weariness and chattering teeth, I didn't dare spend any money on such a luxury as a bed.

His wife, however, took pity on me and insisted that I be given the cot anyway, "*porque el pobre está muy enfermo* — because the poor fellow is very sick." And so the man spread a skin over it and told me to lie down. His wife presently brought a venerable old hag to see me — the local *curandera*, or medicine-woman. Her coarse, white hair hung down over her shoulders and into her peering purblind eyes.

She ran her wrinkled, bony fingers over my forehead. "Take off your clothes," she ordered.

My teeth were already chattering; the night was icy; besides, I felt a bit dismayed to appear naked before her. In this Adamesque stole I was soon surrounded by a dark circle of dusky Indian faces — for everybody in the vicinity had heard of the sick white stranger. I lay there, naked, shivering, an object of intense curiosity, and stared up through the branches of a gigantic quince-tree at the stars above a black, overhanging spire of rock. The quavering ocote torches flung quick pools of brilliance on the dark skins and the tree-trunks. The river rustled mournfully and the wind crooned.

The *curandera* massaged me briskly until my skin glowed. Taking an egg, she rubbed it gently over my whole body from head to toe. Then, breaking the shell, she let the contents fall into a glass of water. This she held up to one of the ocote torches. Everybody gazed at it in tense silence. Through the liquid and her shaking, yellow fingers the egg glowed milkily — serpentine in shape.

"A snake!" she exclaimed. "He has been *pegado por el aire* — hit by the wind."

A queer gasp ran around the circle.

"Put on your clothes," she told me. One of the Indian women had dried them — rags though they were — over a

charcoal brazier and now helped me into them. They were warm and pleasant.

"To-morrow," said the *curandera*, "he is to have a bath in the *temascal*." She pasted green leaves on my temples and made me drink a hot pungent tea.

The *temascal* proved to be a low, conical bath-house, heated by an external fire-box. I took off my clothes and crawled inside through a low opening to lie down on the straw-strewn floor. The interior was already quite warm, but when the entrance was closed behind me, the place became more stifling than the heated platform of a Russian bath. Soon I was perspiring copiously, sweating from every pore. I lay there about twenty minutes in the intense dry heat before the entrance was reopened and I could come out. An Indian woman splashed me with pitcher after pitcher of cold river water, after which she gave me a vigorous rub-down. The next day I was much better. At parting, the *curandera* gave me a smooth, round stone with a hole in the centre. "This is an *jejecatl*, a wind stone," she told me. "Wear it around your neck and the wind will not 'hit' you again."

The next night I stopped at a cabin up a side ravine and was astonished to see an enormous brass bed. This, the old couple told me, had been sent by one of their sons all the way from America. We all slept in one room, six of us, and I was most amused to see the old couple crawl underneath the bed rather than trust their weight to the springs. Nor could I convince them that the brass contraption was really meant to be slept *on* not *under*.

The dream of the younger son, Martín, a gentle, pensive chap of about twenty, was to follow his older brother to the United States. He was most anxious to learn English, and that night before going to bed, as we sat on the rear porch of the house, he asked me the equivalent in my tongue of dozens of objects. After much searching, he finally found a

sheet of smudged paper and a stubby pencil, and with labour-gnarled hands painfully traced out the words I spelled for him. We had no light except one spluttering candle, which his sister held close to the paper, her free hand ready to catch the hot falling wax. The others crowded around to watch Martín struggle with the stubby pencil — the two old people, two daughters, and a neighbour boy. Their faces, flecked by the gleams from the candle, revealed the most intense awe at the process, for none of them had ever been to school, and the written word was for them a thing of mystery and magic. Just beyond the porch came the sound of animals in the corral, and a soft but cold wind rustled the trees and, striking my back, made me shiver. But Martín noticed nothing but the sheet of paper. He was insatiable, and far into the night, while his sister patiently held the candle, he asked me name after name in English, and toiled with his stubby pencil; for, struggle as he would, his blunt fingers refused to perform the unaccustomed task with any facility, so that his letters were huge and scrawling and altogether laughable.

The next morning, when I left, he almost wept. I have never seen a human being so hungry for the crumbs of knowledge as that Indian boy in the high, wind-swept Sierras of Mexico, who dreamed of some day following his brother abroad into the land of plenty; nor have I ever seen people so awed by the cabalism of mere written words; and ever since that strange, mountain night, the words that I have put on paper have seemed more magical and more precious.

III

As the trail wormed upward, I heard much of Topia, a prominent mining-town stuck on the tiptop of the Sierras in the old Villista district. The icy waters tumbling down the



MEDICINE WOMAN



BATHHOUSE

ravine were now tinged a bright emerald green by the slag from the copper mines higher up, and the Indians on the trail warned me not to drink of them. I passed a romantic-looking town, pale chocolate, on the shoulder of a hill, and a church whose massive walls rose out of the stream itself. In some places, here also, the *camino real* passed over hills and was worn down into the living stone several feet deep by the countless sandals that had shuffled over the path ages before the coming of the white man.

I climbed along under long flumes from the mountain-side into the ravine, struggled up a path so steep that it sapped my breath, and finally landed with quaking legs in the tilted, winding, cobble-stone streets of Topia itself.

Topia was a dying town. The copper mines, owing to the revolution, had long been shut down, but the inhabitants had clung on with their prodigious Indian capacity for starvation; the people were dying like flies.

The grass grew high between the stones; moss smeared the flaggings and the walls of the houses, that hung so precariously on the steep slopes. These houses, a tangle of quaint red roofs, seemed vertiginously ready to slip off into the ravine below — picturesquely they huddled on height and in hollow.

I reached the main plaza, where frozen, ochre oranges drooped from scraggly trees. In the centre loomed a crumbling moss-eaved kiosk.

I plumped down my blanket and sat there in the pale daffodil sun, drying my damp, ragged clothes. I was again shivering with the ague, altogether wretched. My feet were raw and festering. But the sun sent down its warm rays, pouring little shivers of contentment through my aching body. I felt like a bedraggled cat, drowsing on a warm hearth.

Life seemed a queer thing just then — something that meandered inconsequently, without real significance save for

the sensation of the moment. Home in California seemed æons removed. The memory of the past was blurred — faded to an unfathomable, glinting gray with a few bright lights: Fannie, the Ford; pumping up a tire on the glassy, dry lake-bed of Mojave; the Standard Oil office with its clattering machines; the faded Pleiades calendar in Kravaz's cellar; silver trombones; gritty peas; the hole in our map; Josefina's pink frills; brimstone and chili. — From time to time I dozed.

The future at this moment seemed even more fantastic and unrealizable than the past.

I looked down at my wounded, festering feet.

The future?

All I could picture was a continual limping over mountains, a gnawing by insatiable hunger, a constant shivering with ague. All my thoughts pointed to interminable walking — getting food — a bite here, a bite there, just enough to keep going — to keep on — limping, shivering on.

Working at peon's wages? I had tried that. I could try it again. How long would it take to save enough for a suit of clothes — at fifty centavos a day? Supposing I saved ten centavos a day. Six hundred days, sixty pesos, thirty dollars. Two years. Two years of working, hungry, tired — What was a year? An interminable, inconceivably interminable period, an eternity. Yet, somehow, one lived. And even though I was starving, I could see visions, perhaps the great compensation for hunger.

At times the whole cosmos seemed to flash and glitter before me: huge mountains rising out of vast lakes of fire along which plodded the Dantesque figures of suffering men. And along the banks of a vast, heaving ocean came a nude woman, her beautiful body glistening in the emerald spray, splendid as the sun, a wave-born Cytheria. And she moved slowly, with infinite grace and luxury, smiling with the wisdom and

sensuousness of all women. — Temptations of Saint Anthony!

Bleeding feet, what did they matter? Somehow one ate, slept, dreamed. Even for the most miserable of men there are women, be they only in dreams. And the women of dreams, what women they are! Perfect women! Bodies without blemish. Women who give themselves wholly, never a doubt, never an ultimate restraint, never a fear. Grand, satisfying promiscuities! Perfect rhythms of contact — poetry — song — colour — form — the tenth wave perfect — rebirth — wings — wings to the sun!

IV

My thoughts returned inevitably to my gnawing hunger. Strange, this, to concentrate one's whole vital force on the mere problem of getting a few beans to get more strength to get more beans.

A hand fell on my shoulder. I looked up into a kindly, brown face, silvered hair about the temples.

"I'm the store-keeper across the way," he announced, "Carlos Baranda, *servidor de usted*. Can I help you?"

We talked. He asked me whence I had come, where I was going, how long I should stay in town. "Come on over to my store, when you are through sitting here," and with a hearty pressure of his hand, he reassured me that I would be treated well in Topia.

Blessed is the simple, genuine hospitality of a Mexican town! Blessed is the kindness of Mexicans!

A boy, Francisco, a fellow plaza loafer, boasting a pair of hilariously patched trousers and half a suspender, came up to proffer me a flower. I stuck it behind my ear as I had seen Mexicans do. Another chap offered me cigarettes. He told me he was leaving Topia soon because his Rosa had run off

to Durango, with a good-for-nothing colonel. He said he would go with me to Durango, where he would find the colonel and cut his gizzard out and steal his Rosa back. He said this in a mild, suave, unemotional manner, but his black eyes veiled hot jealousy, and his hands shook when he lit our cigarettes.

I sunned myself a little longer, then went over to Don Carlos's store.

"Welcome!" he said, cocking his legs over a barrel and indicating the counter for me. After a while he asked me my wants.

Before I could even reply, he showered cigarettes into my hands, lemons to squeeze into the water, capsules of quinine to ward off fever — all this when I could see at a glance at the patches on his elbows that poor Carlos was having a terribly hard time himself just to exist.

"Young bloods are sporting now," he said sadly. He pointed outside to several cavorting horses with ornately carved saddles, ridden by young men in fancy pantaloons, gay shirts, and ties, silver-braided sombreros, pearl-handled revolvers. "Lucky is the man who travels who does not fall into their clutches."

In parting, Don Carlos told me: "Go up and see Don Enrique, the care-taker of the mines. He is half American — a good fellow. Tell him I sent you and he will look after you." He gave me the necessary directions.

CHAPTER XXV

VOLUNTEER NURSING

I

I SWUNG out an elbowed street, up a by-lane to the edge of the town, where stood Don Enrique's neat house. Short, jolly, vibrantly alive, Don Enrique led me in with enthusiasm, eager for gossip about the States. I was soon warming my chilled hands over a copper brazier.

Enrique positively ordered me to stay at the hotel as his guest until I felt well able to go on. He led me over to the hotel himself. We puffed up a steep bit of roadway, landing at a dilapidated building with spacious arches and weed-clogged *patio*.

I was given a voluble and bowing introduction to the old lady innkeeper, who led me deferentially into a spacious refrigerator of a room. It contained a single canvas cot — nothing more — and was lit by a candle stuck between the broken tiles. Outside, the water gurgled in a weed-choked fountain, and across the *patio* gleamed the ruddy light from the kitchen *brasero*, over which my hag-like landlady leaned, fanning the charcoal, preparing my evening meal of *tortillas*, stewed meat, beans, and bitter black coffee.

The bats darted in and out through my high door, spooky, squeaking, or clung to the ceiling like luminous cobwebs. They filled me with silly fears, and I recalled stories of vampires sucking blood.

After supper I went out into the town plaza, the crisp, cold air cutting my face. I felt alive again, ready to face the

world. To the east the great black crags that I was still to traverse loomed ominously above the town.

A provocative laugh. I looked into two black eyes in the light of the corner arch light, a flirt of gold and red shawl, two lightly shod feet, here in this upland, Indian town. "To all men ——"

II

Two peaceful, dreamy days I stayed at the hotel — a godsend of rest and ease. My feet improved, my hunger was partially sated; the ague and the chill disappeared. Though I still had touches of rheumatic pain, I felt I could impose on my good host no longer, but should have to be moving on.

That afternoon young Francisco, of the half suspender, he who had given me the flower the afternoon on my arrival, asked me to stay with him and his grandmother in "your house, sir." I had expected to go on over the mountains at once, but he was so courteously insistent that I finally gave in.

Half an hour after his invitation I was lugging my blanket through the low doorway into the front room.

This room was not encouraging. The dirt floor and adobe walls were damp and chill; the only light and air to be had crept in through the open door. In addition to an intoxicated bench, on which I declined to trust my weight, was a table, oddly enough quite solid, and some rolls of reed-woven *petates* to be spread out for beds. On the stained walls three portraits, hinting at a sad deterioration in the family circumstances, gleamed gold-framed out of the dark squalor. Nailed to a black cross was a bleeding Christ with a gilt crown of thorns. A pungent odour was wafted from a small float-lamp under a faded print of Mary and the Child.

Francisco's grandmother, Doña María, was a dumpy, flat-nosed (*chata*, the natives say) old woman with frizzly hair. She soon bobbed into the damp hole of a kitchen to fan a

charcoal fire. This room was also windowless and opened out into a high-walled yard about five feet square, cluttered with geraniums in terra-cotta *macetas*. The walls and ceiling were grimy. On a shelf above the built-in, tile stove was heaped a filthy accumulation of pots, jugs, medicines, and religious images. These last, crudely carved from wood or shaped in clay, were more pagan than Christian, although María assured me all had been blessed by Padre Isidro before he had been shot by the bandits.

Doña María soon had a meal ready — biting chili rolled in *tortillas* and a pale, lukewarm beverage, faintly reminiscent of coffee, but without sugar or milk. At subsequent meals we occasionally had frijoles instead of chili — once a bit of meat.

Presently another grandson, Andrés, shuffled in, flinging off sickening fumes of *tequila*. In a stupefied voice he demanded something to eat, yet with a courteous turn to his arrogant words. On seeing me he exultantly produced his bottle. Stirring around among the filth on the kitchen shelf, he discovered a cracked, green tumbler and blowing out the dust — water had to be fetched from the public well — he filled it with transparent liquor. He would tolerate no refusal of its contents. Ostensibly we drank to each other's health; Andrés was too maudlin to notice that I sent my portion over my shoulder.

Afterwards old María told me what a good boy Andrés had been before his father was killed in the revolution and while the mines had still been running. He had taken to drink out of despondency; his funds were derived from gambling or sources unknown — certainly none of it from work.

That evening I met the girl of the family, pretty Dorotea, not more than sixteen, and Antonio, her husband without benefit of clergy. Dorotea was a blossoming almond-tree.

light and graceful and sweet with youth. Her black eyes and lightly pencilled eyebrows had a Japanesy slant. Antonio was a handsome young rascal, with a face round as a harvest moon, an artistic slant to his felt hat, and a selfish curl to his full lips. They had been gadding about all day, with an Elysian freedom that aroused María's voluble complaining wrath. Yet the household arrangements in the *jacal* were so primitive, the amount of work so insignificant, that, except on wash days, it seemed rather foolish for two people to be pottering around such a dark den. Nature had certainly shown one of her freakish moods by putting pert, slim-ankled Dorotea in such a dungeon. Perhaps not so freakish either, for southern beauty fades with a quickness proportionate to its perfection, so that one of these days pert Dorotea will want these musty walls to set off her fading charms.

Just at dusk Don Domingo, uncle and musician, ambled in with his clarinet case tucked under his arm — a small man in a neat black suit with a bow tie to set off his suave voice and too obvious aura of breeding.

That night we all slept in those two rooms, with doors barred to keep out the dangerous night-air spirits, which bring strange maladies. The young married couple unrolled a *petate* and snuggled under a blanket over in one dry corner; I in the opposite. The musician slept on top of the table, using his clarinet case for a pillow. The table being too short, he painstakingly adjusted it after three or four trials so that his feet, when carefully lowered with the deliberate motion of a closing drawbridge, would rest on the wall without sliding. Then, with the aid of his teeth, he spread over himself (taking due care to avoid wrinkles) his silk-collared overcoat. Andrés occupied the remaining corner with a *petate*, while Francisco and old María slept in the doorway between the two rooms — on the bare ground and without a blanket. The chill crept up from the dank ground through

the *petate*, through my clothes, through my flesh, freezing the marrow of my bones. Nor were those inured able to sleep with any greater soundness. Every hour or so Don Domingo would stealthily get up to readjust his table and pillow and struggle with teeth and hands to straighten out his precious coat. The old lady and Francisco clung close together for warmth. Only the newly-weds with their whispered sweet nothings, and Andrés snoring off his alcoholic fumes, were oblivious of physical discomforts.

Æons later Doña María opened the front door and scolded Dorotea and Antonio from their blissful couch. The misty dawn surged in like a sea. Against its biting chill I had less vital resistance than against the ground. My eyes ached, my head throbbed, my hip twitched with rheumatic pain. I surreptitiously swallowed one of Carlos's five-grain quinine capsules.

III

The following day, Sunday afternoon, we tagged down to the plaza to hear Don Domingo play in the band in the sagging-eaved kiosk. But even Sunday concerts could not lift the black pall that hung over the town. The epidemics were spreading, and the inhabitants huddled in their hovels in fear or prostrated themselves for hours before the Virgin in the broken-windowed church. In many houses the whole family was ill, and people died as in some Oriental pest-hole, the dead bodies being pushed out of the door into the street by the person most capable of movement. After a time it became impossible to get these bodies buried before putrescence set in.

Two days later disease invaded Doña María's roost. Dorotea was tossing with fever — typhoid. Don Domingo went to sleep elsewhere. Antonio, the worthless husband, conveniently disappeared. The others I tried to instruct as

to precautions — difficult, as no one had the least conception how disease is transmitted. From Enrique I borrowed a cot to take Dorotea off the ground and fetched down clean garments and blankets. Don Carlos gave me the last of his meagre stock of quinine and pills, and I began putting into effect my limited ideas about caring for the sick, for there was no doctor in the place.

Dorotea grew worse. When her fever approached its crisis, María, Francisco, and Andrés all came down, the first two with flu, Andrés with typhoid.

Nursing under the most favourable circumstances, except for women especially gifted, is a disgusting routine; here in this hovel among rags and filth, with no proper kitchen utensils, with no running water in the house, no means of heating anything except by fanning charcoal for hours, with no toilet facilities, at the last without medicines or clean garments, fighting for the lives of people who refused all but their customary indigestible food, who feared air, who feared to be bathed — the details cannot be set down.

Dorotea died. She looked like a child of thirteen in her pale, shrunken prettiness. A coffin was out of the question. I persuaded a bleary old Indian to carry her up a side ravine and went along to help dig the grave.

On my return I found that Francisco had flopped off the cot. I took up nursing again with a clogged dullness of mind and body. The succeeding days are black in my memory. One afternoon I pitched into my cot, too dead tired to move, and woke hours later, knowing I also had the flu. Fortunately my attack was light. I was able to attend to the most necessary wants of myself and the others. Two of them lived, Francisco and Andrés. Old María unexpectedly dropped dead of heart failure when she seemed out of danger.

I went back to the hotel, where I slept eleven hours a day for a week, not knowing or caring how the rest of the village was faring.

CHAPTER XXVI

AN INDIAN MAIL CARRIER

I

DON CARLOS told me that the trail to Tepehuanes (the next large town, terminal of a railroad spur from Durango) was very poorly marked and that I would surely get lost unless I followed the Indian mail carrier, Wenceslao, to whom he introduced me.

The two of us left the next morning before dawn, climbing up over the scrabbled trail that leads across the Sierras to Tehuantepec and the central plateau, Sierras even more rugged than those I had already traversed.

The horror of death was still strong in my nostrils, but by sunrise a clean wind was zipping through the pines and whipping the life in me into renewed zest. A primeval, naked dawn it was! The morning light splashed crude purple on jagged cliff and stone-carved valley. I gazed through a gate of god-like crags across a staggering sweep of valley that made human life wholly inconsequent.

For one brief second I half sensed, half understood, the cruel bravado of these people: their reckless, yet Spartan, character, moulded by desert, crag, and drumming, south-land light, by clear, brittle, winter cold and remorseless winds ravaging over vast valleys. For one brief, illuminating second I relived my experiences in the sordid *jacal*; Topia, gleaming like a starving prostitute in the high wilderness; Hermosillo, throbbing in the barren expanse of sand and cactus. I felt again the overwhelming hospitality of Carlos, saw the in-

solent flirt of pearl-handled revolvers in the plaza of Topia, the animal vitality of Margarita, Boyd's wife — like a jigsaw puzzle, scene fitted into scene. Here in these events was the life artery of the Mexican nation. My fingers were on its pulse. In these cruel, heterogeneous incidents lay the secret of the Mexican soul: all the Mexican's recklessness as to means; his elemental greed for crude fact; his passion for emotional finesse; his largess of hospitality, of kindness, of hate, and vengeance; his mediæval fondness for tinselled show — the general's epaulet and gaudy braid, the bull-fighter's flashing *bolero* — all these things mingling and clashing in his soul with an ingrained, brooding, Indian fatalism, and ironic disillusionment with existence that flows in his very veins, a soul sadness, almost a soul sickness, inherited from immemorial ancestors, part of his patrimony from the vast Orient, whence his race began. This fatalism, this disillusionment, is the undercurrent that sinuously, powerfully, weaves through all Mexican life and history and which, bursting forth in blind mass force, shakes and shatters the nation — then sifts the tragic fragments into an exhausted peace, into sullen, apathetic endurance.

II

All that day I kept on without rest or food, following the mail carrier, who had flung his letter sack on a mule and at a furious race climbed up and down the lofty divides, over the ridges, down the precipitous ravines. The level stretches he did on the dead run, no mean feat at these high altitudes. No rest, no food, but on and on at a relentless, fierce gait. My feet were soon rubbed by my *huaraches* into bloody rawness. Wenceslao's own feet were hardened to any atrocity. His *huaraches* were worn at the soles to watch-crystal thinness, and his heels from walking on rocks and gravel were

split into horn-like splinters. On he raced, silent as a shadow.

Only once did he stop to look at the view, at a place where the trail nosed around a precipice — a natural fortress of solid rock. The enormous valley dropped sheer below us, three thousand feet, to a level floor studded with pigmy pines. Far across the valley rose the enormous crags of the opposite range. The morning sun glinted on the surfaces of the rocks, touching them with a thousand fickle tints.

Wenceslao pointed out the strategic possibilities of the battlement on which we stood. "Here four men with guns and supplies could hold an army at bay."

And for the first time in my life I realized what impregnability meant. A few men intrenched in this gargantuan Quebec could stand off the whole world. To apprehend a Villa or a Zapata in this country of rock-bound outposts would be an impossible feat. No wonder the Mexicans laughed at Pershing and no wonder that the life-blood of Mexico has been sapped by bandits and revolutionists!

Darkness plunged upon us before we reached the village where we were to stop that night. We picked our way in pitch blackness down the side of a lofty cliff. Wenceslao strode recklessly on. He knew every pebble and hollow, every turn and twist. But for me, stumbling behind him, every step might have been a misstep, and a misstep meant instant death on the rocks below. Several times I saved myself by clutching the thick vines and clinging grimly to some outcropping.

A valley yawned ahead of us. About nine o'clock I spied a cluster of lights nestling on the banks of a river. We twisted over the lower knolls and dog-trotted through a thick grove of oak trees along winding lanes flanked by cactus walls and fields of corn. Fording the river on stones, we passed through the narrow streets of the town and entered a large *patio*.

Here we ate by the light of candles and sat around talking with the men of the house. One of them pounded up some nasturtium leaves, making a sort of paste, which he applied to my wounded feet. We slept there on the cold stones in the cold court-yard through which the wind swept in fitful gusts.

III

At three Wenceslao was up, tightening the cinches on his mule. We left through a black street of the town, past ghostly *zahuanes*, from which popped a dozen barking curs. We followed a narrow path, not more than six inches wide between a deep irrigation ditch and the dammed-up river. Wenceslao advised me to fall in, for the water was a good ten feet deep and warm as ice. I slipped and staggered along the narrow dike under the black trees for about three hundred yards.

Then we skipped across some stones, turned up a curving path along a fence and forded the river, up to our waist. The water was icy, and the wind against our wet garments cut through us, bitter chill.

We had topped a three-thousand-foot ridge before the sun came out — a purple and rose dawn of incredible splendour; a fringe of pines on an eastern ridge seemed actually aflame!

That noon we reached a clapboard house on a wind-swept ledge among the pines and made a meal on a few wormy apples. We rested for about ten minutes; then Wenceslao pushed on at a dead run along the high divide. In spite of the nasturtium packs my feet were worse than ever, so that keeping up became increasingly difficult. Besides I was not at all strong yet after my flu attack. Fortunately, after a long, hard run along the sky-line, the mail carrier hopped down the side of a rock-strewn slope to a log cabin shanty set among the

piners. Here he talked with an Indian friend for nearly an hour.

But we had to make up for lost time, and Wenceslao went on at a doubly cruel pace. Night had already fallen when we worked our way down a steep ravine over shale and slide. At the bottom we plunged into an icy stream, and my *huaraches* became clogged with sand. They rasped my feet so painfully that I could scarcely walk. I lagged behind. The mail carrier kept calling to me: "Keep up, keep up. We have yet far to go to reach shelter — *mucho muy lejos!*"

I scrambled to catch up. But climbing up the steep slope became too great a torture for my wounded feet. I stopped a moment to fix my *huaraches*. One of the thongs broke. I sat down to mend it. Tearing some more cloth off the end of my shirt, I stuffed it between the thongs and the sores on my feet.

IV

When I stood up, I could neither see nor hear the mail carrier. I called, but received no response. Somewhat alarmed, I hurried up the trail along the side of the ravine, sliding and slipping at every step. Once I fell, rasping the skin off my hands. I finally came out upon a gully between two rolling slopes. The trail debouched into the sandy bottom. I followed along for several miles; then the gully became narrower and steeper and the undergrowth thick and obstructing. I had lost the trail.

To make matters worse a light snow began sifting through the trees. I was still in my lowland clothes, ragged from travel — thin underwear, light khaki, and no coat. I had lost a sweater I once possessed, and my blanket was on the mule. I grew more and more alarmed. Retracing my steps, I tried to find where I had entered the gully. When I discovered what I thought to be the right place, I walked carefully along

trying to see where the path left the sand. But the ground was now powdered with snow, and at best the trail had been dim.

So when the brush became too thick, I cut up the side of the gully, hoping to come upon the proper route. The climbing was steep and difficult. My feet slid in the gravel, or sank deep into the thick carpet of pine needles. Huge, fallen trees blocked my path. Dense clumps of undergrowth scratched my skin and tore my thin clothes. I diagonalled along the steep slope, hoping to find some way out or recover the trail. But the way grew steeper and steeper. I became frightened and climbed and clawed my way more excitedly. The slope was quite precipitous now. Several times I nearly fell. I rounded the nose of a mountain. Beside me yawned an enormous ravine. As I approached the edge of the precipice, the mountain fell away ever more sheerly. I had to grasp the branches for support. Suddenly a weathered rock crumbled beneath my feet; the branch to which I was holding broke. I went rolling dizzily towards the edge of the cliff, not more than thirty feet away. As I rolled, I clawed and fought for a hold.

Terrible regrets and fears swarmed upon me those brief terrible seconds. Why had I not kept up with the mail carrier, cost what pain it might? Why, indeed, had I ever set out across these mountains alone? A jumble of thoughts seethed in my mind even as I clutched for a hold to stay my descent. But every tenth of a second my body gathered momentum. My breath was jolted out of me; my legs and arms were scratched and bruised as I whisked through the underbrush. Another moment and I should be at the edge and gone. And even as I clutched and fought, I sensed myself falling, falling down into the abyss.

A thump! A jolt that knocked the breath clean out of me!

V

Cautiously I felt about me. I was lying against a fallen tree. Turning over carefully I set my foot for a hold. My leg plumped into space.

I thrashed out desperately, heart bursting. My nails dug into the trunk of the tree. Dazedly I reassembled myself, got to my knees holding on to a root and bracing myself against the trunk. Peering over the latter, I found myself staring down into the bottomless pit of the night-draped valley.

The fallen tree was held there on the very brink of the cliff by an overhanging oak. So close was it to the edge that my foot had shot through an opening between it and the stone when I tried to get up.

Below me — the vast ravine! Behind me — the mountain-side, horribly steep! I had been a fool to cross here in the dark. I worked my way closer to the oak that held the fallen trunk in place and sat there in the snow to recover my poise, back to the wet bark, the light flakes drifting into my face and over my hair — a regular Tom o' Bedlam. I had lost my hat.

From the other side of the ridge came the mournful wail of hungry timber wolves. Their eerie, savage cry cut through me. I brushed the snow from my hair, shivering with fear and cold. Did people die sitting in the snow all night? I was so shaken and despairing I had no energy to get up. Even if I went on, should I not fall exhausted before dawn, to freeze to death or to be torn to pieces by wolves? I sat there stupidly, growing colder and colder.

At last the icy chill become unbearable. Cautiously I attempted to climb back up the side of the mountain and get around to where the ravine would not be directly beneath me. At first I was painfully stiff and I had hurt my left leg badly.

Inch by inch I crawled along, carefully testing every foothold and every handhold. Finally I was back to safe ground and limped up the side of the mountain, zigzagging from black ledge to black ledge under the dark pines.

How long I walked or just where I do not know. The snow stopped falling; but it was still deathly cold under the trees. My bare, sandalled feet were almost frozen, my body numb. Far away I could still hear the mournful yap of the timber wolves. I limped along. Several times I went sprawling into the thin snow, bruising my knees and tearing my hands. Occasionally branches whipped into my face and once a sharp, dead twig poked into my cheek, gashing me so badly that I carry the scar to this day.

Finally I came out upon a deck of level rock. A light! A light! Columbus could have been no more excited than I was at that moment. Balboa upon a peak in Darien no more thrilled. Far down the vast range I saw a fire burning in the black night, and, far beyond, another — and a third!

Fire under the *ramadas*! People!

VI

My first impulse was to head directly for the nearest fire. But soon I realized that the enormous ravine into which I had so nearly plunged intervened. However, on the side of the mountain on which I was now standing, there was no precipice, and though the descent was perilous, it was at least feasible. And I was so eager to get to some habitation that I did not realize how inately I took my life in my hands.

Yet the odds were perhaps equal. To remain here in the forest on the mountain height in the snow might lead to discovery by wolves or being frozen. To go on might mean a plunge to death; yet it held the possibility of reaching shelter.

It was a long, arduous climb, down, down, down, along

narrow, dizzy ledges of stone, across steep slides of earth. Now and then an ill-chosen footing would send boulders roaring down the side of the mountain, awakening terrifying echoes far and near. Sometimes I mistook a plant and seized hold of sharp thorns, or bumped into spiny cactuses. Now and then I would brush my face against a branch and start my cut cheek to bleeding again. I would dig in my heels and sit down to swab at it with the sleeve of my shirt.

By some miracle I gained the bed of the ravine, forded the stream, and ascended the more tractable slope on the opposite side that led to the low ridge where I had seen the fires. About four o'clock in the morning, freezing with cold, exhausted, I stumbled through a cactus fence to the threshold of a *ramada* and collapsed on the dirt floor beside the fire.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE VILLISTA ATTACK

I

I WOKE stiff and cold. The fire had burnt to graying embers. The dawn was reddening the east. The man of the house came out of the front door, a massive affair with lintels of stone set in rough-hewn logs. He was a burly good-natured cattleman and greeted me with a cheery roar. The mail carrier, he said, had passed through early the night before and had left my blanket. He pointed toward the corner. My blanket right beside me! and here I had been lying on the ground, freezing.

I was stiff as a rusty hinge. My throat was terribly sore. My eyeballs ached, and a dull pain throbbed in my wounded cheek, which had become uglily inflamed from the cold. Fortunately, rolled up in my blanket were still some of Don Carlos's lemons. Drawing some water from an olla, I scraped the embers together and made hot lemonade. Cup after cup I drank. Its welcome warmth went clear to the pit of my stomach.

The rancher invited me to go with him out to his corral, where stood some twelve cows, the remainder of a herd of two hundred, that had been scattered by bandits or killed off by an epidemic. I draped my blanket over my shoulders, but, though the morning sun was bright, patches of snow gleamed in the lee of logs and wall, and the thin, upland air was biting. I shivered constantly.

The log-cabin, its shingled roof battened down with boulders, stood at the head of a long, gentle sloping meadow, broken by outcroppings of rocks and rambling stone fences. The region was sear and swept by upland winds. My host drew a large *jarro* of milk from one of the cows.

The four women of the house, his wife, sister, sister-in-law, and mother-in-law were all sick, two with the flu, two with typhoid. Epidemics of both were raging all through the Sierras. The rancher was the only able-bodied person about the place.

He led me into the room where the four sick people were lying. Dipping an earthenware cup into the *jarro*, he gave each patient a drink of milk in turn, passing the flu germs to the typhoid patients and typhoid germs to the flu patients. When the four had drunk, he scooped out another cupful and offered it to me. The milk steamed fresh from the cow. I had no will to refuse it. This was my first nutriment in many hours. I drank not one but many cups. In my weakened condition I fully expected to get either the flu again or typhoid.

At ten o'clock, when I bade the rancher good-bye and set out down the meadow, I was still stiff and sore. Every muscle ached. My leg was badly bruised and inflamed. I had had but little rest. I limped along the sear meadow for about five miles to another stream. Here I sat down in the sun, my back against my blanket roll to rest. I dropped off to sleep instantly. When I woke, the sun was dipping behind the western mountains.

I skirmished around gathering wood for a fire, cooked some rice, into which I cut some dried meat given me by the cattleman. Then I curled up in my blankets.

But I had slept too much during the day. Now I could not get comfortable. It was fiendishly cold beside the stream. The wind soughed and wailed down the valley, tearing at me with icy fingers. I could not edge close enough to the

flames to feel their warmth. Besides I was afraid my blanket would catch fire again.

Late the following morning I debouched from the meadow into a wide-open valley. Far across on the rising mountains beyond, a log-cabin town perched lonesomely on a bold spur. By noon I had reached the foot of the red bluffs on which it stood. Two cow-boys were out practising lariat throwing on a couple of steers. I climbed to the town.

Here the wind was again in evidence. It swept up the dusty street, freezing cold. I seemed in the very mouth of the wind-god and even though it was midday, the sun was a watery, ineffectual disk.

I walked down the forlorn place, peering in at the doorways. Most of the houses were deserted. The town seemed lifeless. Two red-eyed crones sat at the doorway in the feeble sun, skinny arms wrapped about their bony bodies. I asked them what was the matter with the town. They told me that of the two hundred and fifty people in the village, all but about a dozen had been killed by the flu epidemic — "God punishing his people. Their dead bodies are still lying in the houses, rotting; no one to bury them," she wailed through toothless gums. She herself seemed to be the very symbol of death, and with sudden fear sprouting in my heart, I hurried on up the street along the *camino real*, that led into the rough-hewn mountains beyond. Far below me I caught a glimpse of the two *vaqueros* teasing the steers.

The wind grew ever more violent, a veritable blast ravening through the canyons. For two days this gale held me back to a fighting progress of two or three miles an hour, or inconsistently hustled me down over the pitching trail of a precipice at breakneck speed.

Here the houses I encountered were better built than those at Culiacán or in the lowlands — not thatched wattle-woven huts plastered with adobe, but substantial log cabins,

the hand-hewn roof shingles five times the size of an ordinary Anglo-Saxon shingle, and battened down with huge boulders. From high up on the ridges these boulders, far below on some sweeping valley, seemed pebbles scattered with the intentional carelessness of a child playing jacks. The inhabitants — mostly Tepehuane Indians — told me that for all of this precaution, the eternal wind of these chute-like canyons sometimes picks up roof and boulders and hurls them abroad with the gusto of a giant tossing quoits.

All that long trip I encountered typhoid and influenza. On my way through the narrow gorges I frequently stood aside with bared head to permit the passage of funeral processions. For death lurks in the landscapes of northern Mexico. Harsh elemental crudeness predominates, as though the raw stuff of primordial creation was upheaving before one's very eyes. As I swung along a sky-line the following morning, the red rocky hills were as rough-hewn as on the day of their nascence. Beyond them the blue, jagged teeth of the Sierras sawed the luminous, flickering sky. Somewhere beyond lay Tepehuanes.

Yet occasionally the severity of the country was pleasantly broken by small villages, nestling green on the banks of some arroyo where a thin stream of silver water trickled miraculously through the barren hills.

II

I was approaching Arroyo Verde, this side of Tepehuanes. Now and then, as near Culiacán, I passed burros bound for the town, laden with wood, or charcoal, or crates bursting with apples, oranges, or occasionally earthenware. The nearer I came to Arroyo Verde, the busier the trail became, especially with the coming and going of soldiers, for this was in Villa country, and bandits were rife. Most of these

soldiers were ragged, at best uniquely and outlandishly attired. They carried every make of rifle — Remingtons, single-loading Mausers, Enfields. New and sleekly uniformed officers, with handsome horses and beautifully worked trappings, swung out to let me pass, or hung one leg over the saddle to exchange cigarettes and talk. Once a tall, tiger-lithe young woman in black, with a heavy veil over her face, swept down with a splatter of silver into a small stream. A few quick words to an officer in a mouse-gray uniform — a debonair young devil — then both wheeled and were gone with quirt and spur and dust-spraying hoofs.

The full significance of these comings and goings did not come to me until I dropped down over a red ridge into the outskirts of Arroyo Verde, long after dark.

Suddenly at a turn in the road a gruff voice commanded :

“ *Alto; hands up!* ”

My hands hit the stars as I saw a gleaming carbine pointed at my breast.

“ What party? ” was the next demand.

“ No party. ”

“ *Quién vive?* — Whom do you cheer for? ”

“ *Viva México!* ”

Thereupon I was taken to the “ general ” in charge to explain why I had ventured on the streets after dark when orders had been issued to shoot on sight. The general profusely apologized when he discovered that I was an *extranjero* just come to town, and sent me to the home of a villager to be entertained, warning me to keep off the streets and out of sight.

Firing with the Villistas began the following day at eleven o'clock. All day the bullets whanged through the trees and splattered on the adobe walls. Yet peeking out the doorway of the *patio* a number of times, I saw women with *jarros* on their heads going down to the river for water, and others



¿QUIÉN VIVE?



WAR OR LOVE

with large baskets headed for the markets — as though nothing untoward were occurring.

At sundown the Villistas were calmly permitted to occupy half the town. And that night Villistas and Federals painted the town red, galloping back and forth half drunk down the crooked streets, discharging their guns and shouting:

“*Mueran los gringos* — Kill the gringos.”

I was the only gringo in hundreds of miles!

Early the next morning the Villistas quietly folded their tents and slipped away, like the proverbial rain, to come again some other day.

The people where I was staying had a pig barbecue in my honour, right in the *patio*, a primitive feast, in which you grabbed out hunks of pork flesh with your bare hands and ate it as hot and sizzling as you could stand it.

During the day I wandered about the town, noting the gouges of the bullet holes from the firing of the day before. And I went in bathing in the little stream that divided the town. Above me tiers of houses loomed white on a red hill. The half-orange dome of the local church gleamed like a signal mirror in the sun.

About three o'clock I bade good-bye to my host and the “general” who had been so alarmed for my welfare, a loveable little scoundrel with a strut, black, curling moustaches, and drooping, cynical eyes, quirking with malicious humour and self-importance.

III

Tepehuanes lay over the hills, about seven miles distant. I reached there towards sundown and stopped in a little store in the outskirts of the town. The owner invited me to sleep in a back room. The following morning I went on into the main plaza.

Tepehuanes, where years later a friend of mine, General Murguía, was shot by a firing squad, is a rambling town set on the bluffs above the wide meadow sands of the river. The streets, raying out from the plaza, in one direction seem suddenly to drop off into space, in the other, go shooting up the steep slopes.

The plaza was full of loungers and I was made much of. Everyone was interested in anybody, especially a stranger who had crossed the Sierras alone. I was now in the central plateau, more or less, and the worst portion of the Sierras lay behind me — sharp-toothed, jagged heights that loomed to the west of Tepehuanes, mysteriously forbidding to these people of the lower country.

I did not go hungry in Tepehuanes. People vied with each other to offer me hospitality. I soon made friends with Don Ursulo de la Torre, a man with a queer mixture of gentleness and hawk-like sharpness. He owned a lace, ribbon, and calico stand in the market, and knew all the tricks of the trade, down to cheating on the last thumb-width. He hailed me as I was passing through, struck up a conversation, invited me to drink *tequila* at a neighbouring outdoor table, and ended by taking me to his home to eat.

He was married; though on the way home, we called at his sweetheart's house, a handsome devil of a woman, who lived in a snug little place overlooking the bluffs, in a convenient, retired part of the town. She was not the heavy type of low-class Indian woman, but a long-limbed, long-breasted, panther-like mestiza. Her motions were quick and deft, and her conversation had a baffling pungency. She was one of these phenomenal women whose spirited independence bends and moulds and rules men: who too often break and destroy the objects of their affections. Don Ursulo was truly proud of her, and he watched me closely to see the impression she made on me.

Don Ursulo lived, however, with his pale, sad-eyed wife and his portly mother, a jovial mountain of flesh, who spent her hours glued in front of the sewing-machine.

When I came in, she bobbed up with pleased attentiveness and hurriedly set the one serviceable chair at my disposal, then bustled around preparing cold punch, for the day was unusually warm. She ran the house, not Don Ursulo's timid wife. Every move and gesture of Doña Guadalupe, the mother, had a note of matronly kindness. She loved Don Ursulo with a love that obviously surpassed understanding. She was putty in his hands, and he ordered both her and his wife about with kind firmness.

I stayed in Tepehuanes four or five days and always took one meal daily at Don Ursulo's house, and had to decline invitations from most of the other people in town. The second afternoon, when I was sitting in the plaza, an orderly came over from the *cuartel* on the corner to tell me that the commandant would like to see me.

Wondering what could be the matter and recalling Que-ro-babi, I went over with some trepidation.

The commandant was unusually young, a slim, well-groomed, curt chap. He immediately revealed his pet vanity.

"Do you speak French?" he demanded abruptly.

"No, I understand a little and can read it."

"*Muy bien.*" He scribbled out several questions on a slip of paper.

"What is your name? — What nationality are you? — Where do you come from? — Where do you wish to go?"

He watched me read them. "Can you answer them?" he demanded.

I nodded and taking up a pen, wrote the necessary answers, also in French.

He was visibly pleased at this interchange. "You are an

intelligent person," was his comment. "No one is intelligent in this place," he groaned. "God, to be in Mexico City, or Paris, anywhere but in this God-forsaken hole. You are intelligent. To-morrow I issue you a pass to go with the troops to Durango."

CHAPTER XXVIII

AN ATTACK BY BANDITS

I

THE train was to leave at five in the morning. Don Ursulo wished one last glimpse of me, and insisted that I have breakfast with him, at the unearthly hour of four-thirty.

I was at his house even earlier. The door was locked, and I hammered, heavy strokes that echoed down the dark street.

The sleepy voice of his mother answered, saying that Don Ursulo was already down at the market; I was to meet him there. She bade me a *cariñoso* farewell.

I soon found Don Ursulo, and we drank hot coffee in a little stand lit by eerie torches. The chill morning wind galloped through the market in fitful gusts — uncanny ghostly riders.

We tramped down the steep road to the sandy bottom and followed along a row of ancient poplar trees, uncomfortably dampened by a fine drizzle — “*chipi, chipi*,” Don Ursulo picturesquely called it.

In the sands beside the station we found the outgoing guard bivouacking about fires, shivering in their sarapes, and we had more coffee.

Gradually the morning cleared and a silver halo quivered over the western summits. The train was late; but about five-thirty it wheezed up to the platform — a freight train, to the end of which was tacked a passenger coach, with shattered windows, and an armoured car.

The soldiers—the usual ragged crew of those days—clambered into this last. Don Ursulo gave me a long embrace and I piled in after them.

All morning long as the train wound through the narrow canyons, around curves, and over high bridges, we squatted on the bottom of the car, chatting, telling obscene jokes, or playing cards. This diversion was only interrupted at the captain's call to man the rifle holes as we passed some place notorious for its bandit raids. Alongside the track stretched mile after mile of twisted, torn-up rails, and here and there the rusting ruins of trains less fortunate than ours.

As we shot through one narrow, rocky cleft, the captain pointed to a black heap. "Two weeks ago the train was derailed, thirty-two soldiers shot in battle, and fourteen passengers, men, women, and children put to death."

At noon the soldiers lit fires on the steel bottom of the car to roast their *tortillas* and boil coffee. I was soon crunching on red-hot chile con carne, rolled in a *tortilla*, and drinking a weak imitation of Postum out of a rusty tin cup.

As we rolled through the green mountains and roared across twisting arroyos, the country became more hospitable; the villages clustered more prosperously around their church spires, and well-built huts, set in the midst of corn and garlic bloom, peeked from the cactus fences. At the crossing, soft-eyed women sat perched on their tiny burros, or trotted along with bare ankles and swaying baskets, sometimes with chubby *niñitos* slung across their backs in blue shawls.

II

Durango! The night of my arrival I decided to deliver a letter that Don Domingo, the clarinet player of Tepehuanes, had given me for a relative, faintly hoping that doing so would result in a night's lodging. Under a street lamp I

stopped to make out the address on the envelope, which had got smudged.

An elderly lady leaning from the balcony of a house near by called to me, asking whom I was seeking. She gave me the proper directions — to a retired street in the poorer section of town — and then began asking me personal questions. Shortly her twin sister came out and joined her. They were two funny old maids dressed in the most antediluvian fashion, but jolly, well-meaning, and nose-pointedly curious. They brought me out coffee and other food to the balcony, gave me a peso, and in parting told me I would always be welcome to come back and get something to eat.

But I could not find the address. And as my feet hurt me, I got a policeman to direct me to a cheap hotel — twenty-five centavos a night. My room opened out on a large, central *patio* full of horses and burros, whose cracked braying awoke me time and again all night long. But it was good, luxuriously good, for a change, to have a regular place to sleep. It gave me a chance to wash my feet, which were in a very bad, festering condition, and which I had not been able to bandage properly, owing to lack of clean cloth. The wrappings were now ragged, gummed up, and dirty. So I boldly tore off one of the ends of the sheets and bound the wounds tightly and neatly.

Breakfast the next morning was given to me by a hospitable Indian woman in the market. It consisted of sweet-potatoes, cooked in syrup, and *tortillas* made of blue corn. She absolutely refused to accept the centavos I held out.

Next I delivered Don Domingo's letter to a frigid, suspicious female, who sighed an obvious sigh of relief when I left.

Back toward the central plaza again. Down a street from the cathedral, through a window, I saw a bearded, stocky foreigner pecking away at a Blickensderfer type-writer, a

model of the eighties. I was quite amazed and went in to tell him that one of my Moravian forbears had invented and manufactured this very type-writer. After a long and pleasant conversation, Herr Van Damm gave me something to eat, a pair of Hanan shoes, almost new (but which I could not wear on account of my wounded feet), and a *Bittelbrief* to all the Germans in Durango, about thirty in all.

I spent the whole day taking this letter around to the people whose names he gave me, hunting them out from one end of the town to the other. On the whole I was treated very pleasantly. I remembered particularly one tall young German who laughed at my appearance until the tears ran down his face. He gave me two pesos and lots of encouragement, which I needed, for his dogs, two Danish bloodhounds, had scared me to death when I first came into the yard. In all I collected thirty-two pesos.

In the evening I saw Herr Damm again. He congratulated me on my successful "Bittelbriefing" and gave me a note to the freight conductor, so that I could leave on the morning train.

I looked around for another hotel, not wishing to go to the same one where I had mutilated the sheets. But everywhere else they asked me double the price, so, taking a chance, I finally went back to the first place. Fortunately nothing was said about my depredation.

III

At four o'clock the following morning the hotel *criada* hammered on my door to awaken me in time for the train. I opened it to ask her for some hot water with which to bathe my feet. She stood there in the dark, holding a guttering candle, which she protected from the wind with her thin, yellow hand. The pale light flickered on her wrinkled, Indian

features and straight, black hair. She shuffled off — in her long, loose skirts and *rebozo*-covered head, mysterious as a witch. Far away on the other side of the town sounded the eerie screech of locomotives in the train yards making up trains. A faint, chill breeze fluttered through the *patio*, rustling the banana fronds. I shivered and slammed the door.

Light was just silvering the edge of the east when I went down the long street to the station, a street lit with the lanterns of the policemen and stray bonfires. At the station itself a hundred torches flickered over little lunch stands. I drank a cup of coffee standing, and munched a crisp *tortilla*, then hurried through the gate, fearing to miss my train.

But it was nearly six o'clock before we pulled out across the bare, rolling, upland country.

The conductor, Jorge, first put me in a box car; then, when we had pulled out, invited me into the caboose. He was a short, sprightly, agile individual with spiky, black hair, and wild gusts of enthusiastic talk, who whirled in and out of the caboose on his duties like a small edition of a whirlwind.

In addition to the regular crew I had another fellow traveller, Pancho, a stubby, big-paunched Indian, clad in an ornate leather jacket and tight leather trousers that fitted his legs like a sheath clear to the ankles. How he ever got them on or off was a mystery never solved during our three-day trip. I praised his attire fulsomely.

"Your pantaloons and jacket are superb!"

He beamed, then laughed, a chortling laugh like the gurgling of a bottle. "Yes, they *are* nice," he admitted modestly, with a benignant inclination of his bullet-like head. "They have only one drawback."

"And that?"

"I can't scratch myself."

That, I agreed gravely, was a troublesome difficulty, but

otherwise his clothes were perfect, beyond anything I had seen in all my travels.

As a reward for my praise he constituted himself chief cook and bottle-washer for the rest of the trip, our diet consisting largely of parched corn, stolen from way-side fields.

IV

Early in the afternoon we reached a station on a high divide. A long, board-like platform and a lunch house painted green, with a corrugated-iron roof, sprawled on one side of the track; on the other crouched little lean-tos of straw and mud and flattened oil-cans. Further on, a box car had been made into a house. A tin smoke-stack elbowed from one window; the doorway was massed with geraniums in terra-cotta *macetas* and tin cans. A woman in a scarlet blouse came to the door and emptied a bowl of water.

From here we dropped down to a wide llano. We passed the smoking ruins of a train that had been burnt the day before. A swarm of huge-winged zopilotes swirled up, inking the sky. Late that afternoon we spied a Granje far across the plain — the outbuildings of a vast *hacienda*, clustering about an orange-domed chapel at the foot of a craggy *peñon*.

Jorge clutched my arm, pointing over the plain.

"*Bandidos!*" he shouted, "*Mire, como corren!*"

A string of horsemen, leaning low and racing their ponies hard, were heading toward us across the llano.

In a great excitement Jorge jumped to the door to rotate his arm. Our speed increased. Soon we were hurtling down the rails at a dangerous rate for a train of empty cars on a rickety roadbed. This struck me as unnecessary until I discovered that the track circled the base of the hills for miles, so that the bandits, by cutting across an arc, stood an excellent chance of heading us off.

They were picturesque, as they streamed across the plain.

We could see the flame of their sarapes now; the glitter of stirrup, saddle, and bit, the stoop of shoulder and peaked sombrero. Now they rode, bridles free, rifle to the shoulder. The whang of their bullets sounded above the clatter of the train.

Jorge resurrected his own rifle and triggered out lead until the barrel smoked. Twice he shoved the gun into my hands. While I jammed it full of cartridges, he rotated his arm for more speed ahead. We were roaring along at a terrific rate; our flat-wheeled caboose danced on the billowing rails. Our cries were lost in the shriek and rattle. We finally had to cling to the walls for support.

For a while it was nip and tuck, nip and tuck. Then it began to look as if we should get away if they didn't pick off the men in the pilot box. Suddenly the train began to jolt. We felt the grind of brakes. A terrific shudder bumped from car to car. Our speed slackened.

The bandits flung themselves to a last burst of effort, quirt and spur, sombreros bent low over saddle-bows.

Just as I thought the engineer intended to halt the train, we jerked around a dangerous curve. The track dipped sharply down grade — an excellent stretch of straight going.

The bandits wheeled to a halt. We had escaped.

Jorge flung his rifle aside and danced an exultant war-dance in the doorway, waving his sombrero and shouting untranslatable remarks.

Going into the inner room of the caboose, I found a pair of shoes and leather-clad legs sticking out from under the benches. I hauled them forth.

Pancho sat up on the floor of the car, regarding me sheepishly; his straight, black hair hung down into his crafty, round eyes.

"It's better," quoth he, "to be a live dog than a dead lion." And he patted his full paunch.

CHAPTER XXIX

DRESSED FEET

I

WE rolled on all that day. After nightfall the cold became intense, knife-like. The huge cracks in the floor of the caboose sucked in air. The wind-gods, it seemed, were pursuing me wherever I went. I rolled up in my blankets, teeth chattering, legs aching. But my blankets were tissue-paper against the cold. The draughty air sliced through me. I couldn't get warm. I couldn't sleep. To add to my comfort, the caboose had a flat wheel. We bumped and jolted. My stomach churned vilely.

At three ten in the morning we bumped to a halt — something out of whack with the engine.

Jorge's feet twinkled down the roof into the rectangle of stars that was the door. He was monotoning: "*Caramba, caramba, caramba,*" a methodical swearing quite out of keeping with his sporadic temperament. The train would not move until the next day.

I stared into the vast dark. A lone cactus reared three arms high against an opaque sky — an enormous, mysterious trident. An orange moon oozed above the mountains, jumped into the sky, turned silver, flooding the world with an uncanny light. The distant hills seemed cut from huge black cardboard. Far off a coyote wailed. On the crest of a nearby ridge emerged the black silhouettes of two natives riding burros, heads bent sleepily; their sombreros bobbed against the rim of the moon.

Dawn at last! Head splitting, throat raw, I peered at the morning star through ghostly light over a country more desolate than I had seen since north-west Sonora — cactus and sand, cactus and sand; and beyond — those splintered, bony hills.

Jorge pranced in with a bottle of *tequila*, that smoked down our throats, but made another day on earth seem feasible. After a while our tired engine waddled off shudderingly. We rattled down grade through half-deserted adobe villages. Apathetic, half-famished Indians stared out from their low doors. Slowly, as the day died in the sky and the lone coyotes howled in the hills, we climbed along desolate, rolling crags, up and up to Zacatecas, an old mining-town, the highest point on the Mexico-Juárez line.

December eve in Zacatecas! This Jerusalem of the west lured me. The wind swept icy cold across the dark divide, but the flat-roofed town, in the sheltered hollow, glowed cheerfully beneath the brittle stars. The pale, ancient arches of the high, Spanish aqueduct stepped across the flat roofs and faded away into the darkness.

I stumbled down a steep, narrow stone-flagged street to the main plaza. But the beckoning lights proved illusory. The wind blew in as from some vast bellows of the gods. The evening was cold; the town desolate. Zacatecas was dying from the revolution, her forty thousand inhabitants already reduced to eight. The bells had not yet tolled seven, yet in other towns the shops would still be open and promenaders would be jostling in the plaza. *Señoritas* in French-heeled shoes and bright scarfs would be strolling provocatively, *caballeros* would be swaggering in jaunty jackets and bright waist sashes. Down the lighted streets would snap coach whips, and at every doorway children would be frolicking and neighbours gossiping.

But in the humped angled centre of this town the lofty

market and dingy post office loomed dark and spectral. Satanic eddies of dust and paper danced in the pale light over their barred entrances. Everywhere the iron shutters of the shops had been rung down; the few cabs with their stumbling Rosinantes were minus side lights; the house doors were closed; the streets almost deserted — only that ice-pointed nozzle of wind from the divine bellows turning me half around at the corners, ripping at my very entrails with cold.

II

Suddenly a little man — big, black moustaches, pink mouth flaring from a very dark face — stopped me, shook hands effusively.

“ American? ” he asked, and, on my affirmative, threw his arms about me like a long-lost brother. “ I shall help you,” he announced. “ Come with me.”

So infectious were his enthusiasm and confidence that I followed without a word, though highly puzzled. We wound through a number of streets. At a house more pretentious than most he lifted the heavy knocker. It sent a long echo of sound through the corridor within. A manservant opened. My companion asked for “ the doctor.”

The door opened wider; we walked in through a high arched corridor to a large, flower-filled *patio* with green arcades. Mounting mediæval stairs, we came to a doctor's waiting-room and seated ourselves.

Presently a spectacled, round-headed man in a white apron came out.

My companion jumped up with beaming alacrity, embracing the doctor as effusively as he had embraced me. He swelled his chest and began to talk:

“ Doctor, I have brought you an unfortunate compatriot. He needs your sympathy and material assistance.”



VILLAGE WELL



CHURCH YARD

"I shall be glad ——" mumbled the doctor. "Come in." We filed into the inner reception room.

"I must be going," announced my volunteer friend importantly. "But you, doctor, will see that our mutual friend has every possible assistance."

"Er — certainly — certainly —" said the Doctor with as good grace as he could muster up.

"Fine! fine!" replied my pink-lipped assistant, rubbing his hands. Then, with sudden fervour, he embraced first the doctor, then me, informed me my troubles in life were now all over, embraced me again, and left, backing out, bowing low.

"Sit down, sit down," said the doctor a bit testily, "and tell me about yourself." He himself sat in a swivel chair, the tips of his fingers pressed together.

I gave him a succinct account and then added: "But who, pray tell, is the man who brought me here?"

"Hm — hm — hm." said the doctor. "You don't know? Why, he is the mayor of the town, and I have to humour him. I thought —— Well, you need money?"

The doctor got up, went to his desk, and brought me two stacks of coins wrapped up in paper. "At nine o'clock," he told me, "the south-bound passenger comes through. I'll send my assistant up with you to talk to the conductor — they are friends — and you can get a ride on south immediately."

When I got outside, I undid the coins. They were pennies and totalled two pesos.

III

At a lugubrious corner I bumped into Jorge again.

"*Amigo mío! Como me alegra!* — My friend, what joy!" A long-lost brother could not have been more warmly

greeted. He flung his arms about me and thumped my back as though I had swallowed a chicken bone. "*Qué diablos!* What an impious hole is this Zacatecas!" And he thumped my back again.

"It must be something in the air," I said to myself, "that makes people so damn' affectionate here." I explained to Jorge what had happened to me and told him I hoped to go south on the nine o'clock train.

Jorge's hands sawed air. "This very night I'm shooting on through to Aguascalientes, with an empty freight. If you don't make the passenger, you can ride in the caboose. If the line inspector sticks his nose in — there are lots of them on this division — I'll chuck you in the tool box. We pull out at nine twenty." With a last heel of hands against his breast he eddied off into the dark.

The doctor's assistant did not show up to put me on the train, so the conductor refused to let me ride.

Jorge's freight train had not been made up at nine twenty, although a red glow pulsed from an engine getting up steam. I paced back and forth, the wind knifing through me. For a time I kicked my heels in the glacial waiting-room; then, shivering, rushed out to pace, pace, pace.

At last the engine nervously began jerking box cars around like an excited mother with too many children. I crawled into the black caboose.

An officious brakeman tried to eject me, but I clung moodily to my seat. I clung there until after eleven, when the maternal engine swept with her brood of cars out into the dreary dark of barren plains and tooth-like hills.

We rolled on south, suffering another night of severe cold. But by morning the country about was more fertile and attractive.

At Acuascalientes, I said good-bye to Jorge. Blanket on my back, I stood irresolutely on the station platform, then

crossed the bare space in the rear to a corner store, where I bought a native Sisal fibre rope to replace the frayed cord over my pack.

I walked up the long tree-shaded road to the centre of town, through the market, the drowsy plaza. Here I sat down to rest, for my feet hurt me very much.

The sores from the *huaraches* refused to heal, and I feared that gangrene might be setting in, for other sores had appeared higher up on my legs — soft, oozy abrasions.

Down a side street I saw the shingle of a German doctor. I rang and was admitted into the wide hallway leading on into a *patio* thickly massed with vines. Other patients were sitting in the hallway.

The doctor, in a white apron, came along the corridor past the potted plants and little trees set in green tubs.

Spying me, his stout face turned pink; in great choler he shouted out:

“No beggars! *Schweinerei*, what are you doing here? Out of my house, you bum!”

I knew how seedy I looked, but had no idea that my appearance would call forth such an outburst.

“I did not come to beg,” I replied, “but to get my feet bandaged.”

He flew into a still greater rage. “I know your tricks. I know your tricks. Out with you! Out with you!”

“I have money to pay you.”

“I won’t see you,” he shouted, his face now positively purple with rage. “You are just a bum. *Heraus! Heraus!*”

But I sat there obstinately. The other clients were called into the consultation room by the doctor’s dapper Mexican assistant, but I was completely ignored.

I considered walking in unannounced, but shrugged moodily and left.

I had had many degrading experiences before this. I had

drunk stinking water, I had begged for meals, I had slept in the gutter, I had lain in the markets, scratching lice, but nothing brought my degradation to my eyes quite so vividly as this choleric doctor in Aguascalientes.

I walked angrily along an irrigation bank out to the station to see when another train would be leaving.

One of the train hands in the caboose of a freight just being made up told me the train would pull out the following afternoon. He assured me that I could ride.

I went back along the road leading up to town along the side of a small stream and, lying down in the sun, was soon fast asleep.

When I woke it was already dusk. Going back up to the market, I bought some food: sweet-potatoes, greenish *tortillas*, thick as cow's hide, and drank some sweetish *atole*. Then I wandered back to the station and lay down on one of the waiting-room benches, not wishing to spend money on a hotel room.

One of the station hands came in about ten o'clock and told me I had to leave, but after some pleading on my part he let me remain.

I tied the shoes Herr Van Damm had given me in Durango to the bench. My money was in a can which I carried rolled in my blankets, for my clothes were ragged and every pocket had holes. This can I placed under my head for a pillow.

I must have slept like a dead man for it was already high morning when I woke with a quick consciousness of having heard some odd, clinking sound. For a few minutes I was so utterly lethargic that I could not really get my eyes open. I had emerged from one of those profound slumbers, body utterly leaden, incapable of the slightest movement. I had no desire to move. My eyes closed again.

But a stark thought flashed through my mind. The money!

I was awake like a shot, sat up. My hands fished around for the can. Gone!

I looked down where the shoes had been tied. Gone!

I rushed to the door. Not a soul in sight! Now I understood the meaning of the odd sound that had evidently awakened me.

I hurried around the station, along the tarred runway to the rear. To three men standing there — one of them a train hand — I excitedly explained what had happened.

They laughed, much amused at my excitement. They had seen no one.

Twice I ran around the platform on all sides, but whoever had taken the things had made a clean get-away.

IV

Crossing the tracks, I sat under a water tank where I could wash my feet. I undid the bandages, the first time I had been able to take them off since Durango. My legs had become a dirty purple colour and several new sores had broken out. The flesh of my left leg was in a disgusting state — squidgy and discoloured. It demanded immediate medical attention.

“I’m going back to the Hun doctor and make him tend me,” I decided. —

The office attendant tried to exclude me, saying the doctor was not in, but I stuck my foot in the door and insisted upon entering.

A woman’s voice called out to learn who had come in. Presently the doctor’s wife, a large, blonde, warm, matronly type, came to speak to me, saying the doctor had gone out to an *hacienda* for the entire day.

I explained to her that I had come here yesterday to have my feet dressed, but that the doctor had driven me away. “They must have attention. Yesterday I had some money;

I wanted to pay. But last night I was robbed. Now I can't pay, and what is worse the doctor isn't here. My feet and legs are very bad. What shall I do? "

"Sometimes I tend to the less important cases," she said and led me into the consultation room where she sat me down in a white enamelled chair.

Gently she washed my feet and legs with warm water, shaking her head ominously the while. Carefully she swabbed the sores with a carbolic acid solution.

"It is wise you came. You evidently have some skin infection as well," she continued. "What it is I cannot tell, but if these wounds were not tended to, you would lose your left leg, or die. I'll have to cauterize the sores with a hot iron."

She heated a blunt rod, and, while I gripped the handles on the chair, she cauterized the four worst sores, including the one that had appeared near my knee. Then she dressed them, winding yards and yards of clean gauze from ankle to knee, and gave me some medicine to pour right on the bandages.

"Have you no socks?" she asked. Socks would protect your feet and keep out the dirt. My husband has an old knit pair. You must keep yourself clean."

"I try to. But these *huaraches* —— And often there is no water, and I've been riding for days on freight trains."

She shuddered. "Come on into the kitchen." She sat me down at the oilcloth table and brought me heaping plates of sauerkraut, meat, and stewed corn. Bread pudding and coffee finished off the meal.

"My husband would be furiously angry at me for doing this," she confessed. "He hates Americans worse than poison."

"I hope some day to repay you."

"Don't think of it. Just be careful, keep clean, and you'll have no further trouble," and she pressed three pesos into my hands as I left.

CHAPTER XXX

JOAN OF ARC

I

THE train was not to leave until eight o'clock that night. About seven thirty I went down and climbed into the caboose. The man to whom I had previously spoken evidently had not been the conductor, for I was promptly driven out again. Another trainman, in the caboose at this moment, followed me out into the darkness.

"If you want to ride, come with me."

About six cars down, he shoved open a sliding-door. "Pile in."

I flung my blankets up and scrambled after. He closed the door behind me.

No sooner was I in than I felt very dizzy. I lay down on the floor, my head on my blanket, deathly sick.

The good *frau's* meal was too much for my abused stomach. I grovelled with pain, clutching my belly, yet straining my ears for any sound without. The wait for the train to start became eternal. Footsteps! The door was moved a crack. A lantern swung in.

A muffled "*Caramba!*"

The door slid wide with a screech, and the conductor who had ousted me from the caboose climbed in, swinging the lantern into my face.

"You! What are you doing here?"

A gripping pain ripped through my bowels. I doubled up with a groan. He prodded me with the toe of his shoe.

"Come on, sit up. Forget that noise and let's see how much money you've got. Where do you want to go?"

"To Mexico City."

"We go as far as Celaya. That'll cost you three pesos."

I fumbled in my pockets. I had wrapped the three pesos given me by the *frau* in a large wad of paper so that they would not fall through the hole in my best pocket. I pulled this out and unwrapped the money.

He snatched the coins from my fingers.

"All right!" he growled. "Only get back in the end of the car. Don't make any noise or poke out your head at stations. *Entiende?* With a last flaunt of his lantern in my face he swung out, closing the door behind him.

I dropped in my tracks, groaning.

Suddenly I heard a rustle as of skirts. A soft hand touched my face in the dark.

I started.

A girlish voice. "What is the matter? Are you ill?"

A girl in a box car! My amazement and curiosity drove away my consciousness of pain. Who could this strange visitant, this girl, be, in a box car at night!"

Her hand stroked my forehead. "Yes, you are sick. What is the matter?"

"My stomach ——"

"Ah, I know. Poor food. Often no food. But you will feel better by and by. Come over to my end. I've been sitting there listening. Did the trainman take all of your money?"

"All of it."

"*Son muy bárbaros, sin vergüenzas* — barbarians — shameless!" she said vindictively.

My nausea returned full force.

"Can you move?" she asked. "I'll open the door a crack, so you'll have some air." The door grated.

She was by my side again. "Your hand, here." She helped

me to my feet and led me to the rear of the car, warning me to avoid some large holes in the floor. There at the end she rearranged my blanket and made me lie down again.

I was most curious about her — a girl riding in a box car here in the heart of Mexico! I had heard of such things in the States, but that such a thing could happen in Mexico, where women are always under lock and key, seemed inconceivable. I had yet to see her face. She too was curious about me. "Want a cigarette?" she asked.

She lit a match, her object more to get a look at me than to light the cigarette.

I caught a glimpse of her face — somewhat broad, but well shaped, the features, for an Indian girl's, rather delicate. In the quick flare of the little wax match her black eyes gleamed hot and restless.

"You are a foreigner," she remarked. "I knew it. And you are rather handsome. What has happened to you? Most foreigners are rich; they rob the Mexicans. But you are poor and sick. I am sorry for you." Her hand stroked my forehead again.

"But you —" I put in.

"I know. You think it queer. And truly it is queer."

"You are so very young, *señorita?* — *señorita?* —"

"Evangeline is my name, Evangeline Huitrón. Yes, I'm just fifteen."

I watched the glowing tip of her cigarette. "And where are you riding to — this way?"

She removed her hand from my forehead to gesture. "I will tell you. I am an Agrarista."

"And what, pray tell, is an Agrarista?"

"One who wishes the peons to have their lands."

I smiled at the idea of a fifteen-year-old girl being so mortally serious about such things. "And what does an Agrarista do? Ride freight trains?"

"I will tell you, my friend. My village is high up in the mountains in the northern tip of Jalisco, where the state runs far up near Guanajuato and Zacatecas. In the time of Porfirio Díaz, the soldiers took away our lands and gave them to rich men who lived in Mexico City, far away. The new owners put up fences and turned cattle on the land to graze; and the people of my village starved.

"So they joined in a rebellion against Díaz — all of them, because they were starving and thought they could get their lands back. But, though they fought well, the lands were not returned. We waited long and patiently. And then we fought against Huerta — the men of our village. I was just a little girl then, very little. Even some of the men's wives went with them to fight. And then there was peace again and we waited, but the lands were not returned.

"'Let us be patient,' the people said. 'Give the Government time. It has many lands to return to the people. It cannot do everything at once.' So we waited. Yes, we have waited a long time. Even before I was born we began waiting, hoping. 'But Carranza,' the people said, 'is good. Wait. He will treat us well. Give him time.'

"My father had fought in the revolution, but one day he got tired of waiting. He got six of his neighbours to tear down the fences of the land near the village and settle on it. Then the soldiers came and took them away to prison. A month ago ——"

She halted. I sensed a queer tenseness in her. "A month ago I learned that my father had been shot. Fiends!" she cried and struck her fist against the end of the car.

After a bit she went on more calmly. "I went through the village telling everybody they should take the lands, they should fight the Government if necessary. One day I even got up and made a speech. I made many speeches.

"The governor heard of this, so he sent soldiers down to the village with orders not to permit any more speaking. But I got up in front of the cathedral and spoke anyway. Pretty soon a crowd gathered and the soldiers came.

"They shot without warning, right into the crowd, and many people were killed.

"I was shot through the hand. But I slipped into the church, then out the side entrance; so the soldiers did not catch me.

"I went to the house of a friend, and he hid me in a silo of corn, where the soldiers could not find me.

"Now I have run away from the village. I will go to President Carranza and tell him what the soldiers are doing in our village and that the people must have their lands.

"And that is why I am here."

II

Evangelina lit another cigarette. Again the hot flash of her eyes. Yes, this little Indian girl would see the President. She would do almost anything her mind devised. A Mexican Joan of Arc!

The dramatic force of her simple tale gripped me. I saw the whole bitter, heroic picture of the struggle, the timidity, yet purposefulness, of the betrayed villagers. And her own bravery and courage! She was going to see Carranza just as some of the children of the disinherited peasants of Russia went thousands of miles to see the Czar, the Little Father of all the Russians. She represented the age-long tragedy of the profaned and betrayed of earth fumbling out for justice, learning by dint of repeated misfortune to stand and struggle together.

The train, under way for some time, gathered speed. The empty car began bouncing on the track, shaking us violently,

making our teeth chatter. My intense interest had driven away my consciousness of pain, but the violent motion brought back my nausea with renewed force. My stomach churned. I grew deathly sick again. My nausea became unendurable. I reeled to the open door to vomit.

Evangelina was after me with a jump. She held my arm and head while I swayed there at the door.

The night rushed past. The swift wind swept into my face. Into my confused vision surged the fantastic panorama of reeling mountains, shadowy palms, streaming stars.

I vomited again and again, until I thought the lining of my stomach would be ripped out. Evangelina led me back to my blankets in the corner. I shook with fever and chill.

"Come, we must sleep," said Evangelina, and wrapping her *rebozo* tightly about her head, she curled up into a little ball.

I straightened out my blanket. The night was terribly cold — here in this upland region — and I did not see how she could endure the long hours before dawn without cover. Touching her shoulder, I asked her to use my blanket.

But she would not hear of it. She assured me that all her life she had slept with only a *rebozo* about her head, even in the coldest weather. "And often it snows in my mountains," she added.

So I rolled up and tried to sleep. But the chill shot through me. I tossed, with a splitting headache. I must have groaned, for Evangelina was by my side instantly, stroking my forehead.

"What is it?" she asked.

"I am freezing. I have the chills."

"*Pobrecito!*" she exclaimed, and, putting her arms about me in a motherly fashion, she curled up close to me and went to sleep.

The train stopped several times during the night. It was

morning before we reached Silao, the junction for trains going to Guanajuato.

We peeked through the crack in the door at the little town, nestled among the trees. Across the tracks from the station were a number of open-air food counters. We were hungry. Evangelina had not eaten for two days.

I remembered the white silk shirt I had bought back in Hermosillo, still carefully wrapped up in newspaper. This would bring something. When the coast was clear, I darted across the tracks to the stands. I soon struck a bargain.

$$1 \text{ shirt} = \begin{cases} 12 \text{ tortillas.} \\ 1 \text{ small cheese.} \\ 6 \text{ pieces of candy.} \\ 35 \text{ centavos.} \end{cases}$$

But no sooner was I back in the train than my stomach revolted. I turned away from the food. Evangelina ate ravenously, but all her urgings could not induce me to touch anything. I would rather have gnawed the splinters off the side of the car than eat that food.

CHAPTER XXXI

RIDING AN AUTO ON A TRAIN

I

WE reached Celaya about two o'clock. The train went no farther.

Evangelina and I sat down on a grassy ledge beside the tracks, enjoying the sun-dappled shade of an enormous umbrella-tree. The country-side was peaceful. The trees had a fleecy voluptuousness distinguishing them from the blunter growths of more northern climes. The branches fell in long, graceful lines. The warm sun steeped into us.

Two young fellows approached us and struck up a conversation. They listened to our train-riding experiences with reverence, then bought us food, among other things a *cajeta de Celaya*, a small, round, wooden box containing a sweet for which this town is famous, made of brown sugar and milk — a very saccharine and liquidly concoction.

My stomach signalled: "Beware!" and I only nibbled at things.

No train would leave until late afternoon. So we wandered around through the lazy, shaded town. Celaya carries something of the quaint individuality, the independent personality, the *éclat* that clings to many of the Italian cities — a tradition of aloofness and self-sufficiency. Originally Celaya was settled by Basques, the word "Zalaya" meaning "level land"; and the Basques have impressed their stern, hardy, adventurous spirit on every nook of the world they have settled.

Too, Celaya is rich in unified artistic tradition. Here in Celaya lived one of the most renowned of Mexican artists, the architect and painter, Francisco Eduardo de Tresguerras. Here he was born in 1765, and here he worked and died — in 1835. And here in the lazy, attractive plaza, where we seated ourselves, rises his Independence column — a beautiful, simple monument, surmounted by an eagle, head turned backward in order (according to Tresguerras himself) that the royal bird might “not see the barbarities committed by our municipal authorities” — barbarities which Tresguerras had bitter personal knowledge of.

Just as Lucca in Italy is dominated by the arduous, superb creations of the sculptor Civatelli, so Celaya in Mexico has been given a subtle, unique *catchet* by the consistent and tireless labours of Tresguerras. Evangelina and I hunted up his remains in the chapel of Nuestra Señora de los Dolores, in the parochial church of Saint Francis. Here is his *autoretrato*. The picture, though faded, still reveals the brooding intensity of his artistic spirit. The thin, Aztec face, with its sharp aquiline nose, is softened by the dark, meditative, yet penetrating, eyes and the chestnut hair.

In front of this tomb Evangelina dropped to her knees. Pulling her blue *rebozo* tight around her face, she remained in an attitude of pious devotion for fully half an hour, while I stood awkwardly behind her. The *rebozo* outlined a young girlish face, so full of religious fervour I no longer marvelled how so young a child dared to believe herself strong enough to battle in behalf of the people of her village, an infinite Joanesque faith that gave her the zeal and self-assurance to undertake a journey of a thousand miles, without money or friends, in order to face the rulers of her country.

Her vivid religious ecstasy aroused a wistful sense of void in my skeptical heart. Many a time since, in Mexico, have I been moved by the spiritual grandeur of the uneducated and

held spellbound in their vast cathedrals by the sight of their intense devotion. I envied Evangelina her simple devotion.

II

At five o'clock we were back at the station. A long freight train was just pulling out. Not a minute's time to hunt for a good place to ride, so we hopped aboard the last car before the caboose, a flat car carrying an automobile.

The train conductor swung on after us to ask why we had jumped aboard.

After much pleading on our part he finally said that if the young chauffeur in charge of the car had no objections and we kept well out of sight at the stations, we could ride in the machine itself.

The amiable chauffeur, Victor, a lad of eighteen, was glad to have company, and let down the curtains better to hide us. He had already picked up another road companion, a fifteen-year-old boy named Tomás.

The train soon left the level llano about Celaya to climb the stiff grades to the lofty mountain passes that lead into the upland Anahuac Valley, in which Mexico City is situated.

Slowly the sun went down. We looked out over an enormous country, not so desolate as that to which I had grown accustomed, but, as is inevitable with a Mexican landscape, giving the impression of a tremendous, titanic inevitability, of gigantesque natural force. Nature is always overpoweringly greater than man in Mexico. But here, in the country through which we were rolling, this supernatural effect was somewhat softened by the numerous picturesque villages scattered over the country-side, for from Celaya south we were passing through the heart of the Mexican country, its most densely populated region.

The twilight air became very chilly, though soft and glim-

mering. Victor, our chauffeur, a vain chap, with too many drinks from his bottle of *tequila*, now waxed sentimentally familiar. He called us his friends and impressed us with his generosity in permitting us to ride. He patronizingly tendered us his ornately engraved visiting-card. He assured us that when he reached Mexico City, he would promptly become a great personage. No matter, even then he would remain our friend, our loyal friend until death. He drank gulp after gulp and passed the bottle around, urging us to repeated drinks. The stuff was atrocious, and, though I lifted the bottle high, I drank little. As the number of his drinks increased, Victor waxed ever more grandiloquent and sentimentally beneficent.

Night fell. We made arrangements to sleep: he and Evangelina in the back, where it was more roomy and comfortable; Tomás and I in front.

I soon dozed off, but was awakened by a touch on my shoulder.

"What it is, Evangelina?" I asked.

"I wish to change places with the boy," she replied.

Tomás got out, and Evangelina plumped her feet over the back of the seat and slid down beside me.

"He" — she indicated Victor — "is very drunk — he wanted to make love to me. I don't like him."

Soon she dozed off to sleep, her head on my shoulder.

A jolt reawakened me. Victor was thumping my back.

The train had stopped. It was in the early hours of the morning. I poked my head out from the curtain. The freight stood on a station siding, overhanging a ravine.

"We won't go on till morning," said Victor in an ugly tone. "You and the girl have to get out. It's too uncomfortable in here with four. I can't straighten out," he growled, his irritable voice cracked from too much *tequila*.

"I thought you were a good friend of ours."

He burst into a stream of violent language. "The girl's too hoity-toity. You can both get out. I never said I was a friend of yours. I don't want to be a friend of yours. You can both get out."

Evangelina plucked my sleeve. "What difference does it make? If we sleep outside, we can stretch out better."

III

I gathered up the blanket and lifted the curtain. An icy wind whipped into our faces. "Brr, it's cold." Cautiously we stepped off the running-board into the pitchy blackness. The wind whirled us half around. Evangelina clung to me for support. Above us towered the black mountains, menacingly. Below us yawned a black ravine, mysterious tossing trees.

We lay down alongside the machine, but though we hugged close together for bodily warmth, the freezing wind swooped down upon us, tooth and nail. We grew colder and colder.

"This is impossible," I chattered.

"*Vamos!* Perhaps better underneath the auto," suggested Evangelina.

We crawled between the wheels, dragging the blanket after us. But the wind grew fiercer and fiercer. It drove in under the machine. An unpleasant draught from a crack gouged us in the back. Sleep was now impossible. At least the tonneau had been fairly warm, protected from the wind. The body heat of the four of us had warmed up the interior. But here outside, wind and cold were ferocious.

"We can't stand this any longer. Come." I crawled out from between the wheels. "We're going to get back into the machine. Victor, chauffeur and good friend, will get in front where he belongs; we'll take the back."

"But ——"

"Never mind." I reached in and shook Victor brusquely.

"Whatta you want?" he mumbled; then louder, more angrily, jerking his shoulder away: "Whatta you want?"

"Get in front," I ordered him. "The girl wants to sleep back here. She's dying of cold."

He broke into a string of foul oaths.

Angered, I seized him by the collar and shoved him bodily out into the cold.

I pushed Evangelina inside, crawled in after her, and battened down the hatches.

Victor stood outside yelling and swearing, his words crackling in the high wind.

"I'm going to go tell the train conductor," he shouted. "He'll put you out, damn' quick." He was so angry that he began to blubber.

His unsteady footsteps searched along the car, faded away.

I next heard him hammering on the door of the caboose.

"Now you've done it," said Evangelina. "We won't be able to ride to-morrow."

"Anyway," I replied, "we won't freeze to death to-night."

Presently we heard his footsteps returning — solitary footsteps. The curtains in front opened, and silently, without another word to us, Victor crawled into the front seat and huddled against the boy.

I gave Evangelina part of my blanket, and went sound asleep.

IV

The next morning, when we awoke and stretched our cramped bodies, the train was already in motion. The wind had gone down, and the dawn lay over valley and mountain — a purple haze.

Victor woke up soon after. "Good-morning," I said to him cheerily.

"You can't ride any farther with me," he growled. "The conductor is going to kick you off."

His face wore a sullen, gloating expression. He fastened back the curtains so that we should no longer be screened from sight at the stations. But the early morning sun fell warmly and reassuringly upon us, shed a golden refulgence over cliff and ravine.

The puffing train wound up into the mountains. The conductor (who had evidently taken a fancy to us) did not appear to execute Victor's threat.

Twice Victor growled sullenly: "I tell you, you can't ride any more. You have to get out at the next station."

Twice he made long trips over the moving cars to look for the conductor.

Finally a brakeman came back to us. "What's the trouble?"

I offered him one of Evangelina's cigarettes. "Oh, the kid drank too much *tequila* last night; and he's taking it out on us. He'll cheer up after a while."

The brakeman grinned. "Kind of uppish is he? The conductor said I was to tell you to get off. Well, anyway, best not ride in the machine." With a wink he disappeared over the end of the box car in front.

Evangelina wanted to get right out, but I assured her to do so would be a mistake. "The car is more comfortable. We aren't hurting anything. Wait till the conductor himself comes along."

Victor made three or four trips over the train. At every station he hunted up the conductor to protest at our presence. He was now aroused to tearful, impotent fury by our persistence.

At last the conductor, tired of being pestered, swung down over the end of the box car in front of us.

Sotto voce he said: "You'd better not ride any more in the machine. The kid is in charge of it till it reaches its owner in Mexico City. He can make me trouble. Why not sit outside?"

So Evangelina and I got out and sat on the running-board.

The train was now well into the mountains — a gorgeous panorama. Vast peaks and extinct volcanic cones poked into the clear azure morning sky. Little towns glistened like topazes in the green-gold bands of wide valleys and foot-hills. Everywhere, as far as the eye could reach, tall bell towers of churches and cathedrals pierced the turquoise sky. Cupolas glistened like fire in the morning sun. The altitude, the clarity of the atmosphere, the epic vastness of the scenery, the quaintness of the towns, the stark, architectural grandeur of solitary churches perched on the shoulders of bravado hills, the gleam of little lakes, the startling glimpses of trains of burros carrying charcoal or timber from the heights — everything had a mythical, lyrical picture quality — a vast canvas set in an enormous frame of volcanic ruggedness. At times the landscape and the activities of the people — a lone herdsman watching his sheep, a cloud of horsemen spurring behind a drove of cattle — imparted a Bedouin or an Abrahamic character; often the flat-roofed houses, the oriental cupolas, the strange minarets lifted us to Arabia itself.

Early in the afternoon, at a station at the foot of a low hill, the conductor came along again. "I'm sorry," he said, "but we've reached the end of the division. From here on the towns and cities lie close together. There are many people and there are many line inspectors. They would raise Cain and send in bad reports. Besides, the kid is still angry and could make a mean fuss. I'm afraid you'll have to get off."

Ruefully we dropped to the ground beside the train and walked to the road.

We stared up at the scraggly Main Street of the town. It wandered casually up the hill between a miserable cluster

of adobe houses. A few Indians, muffled in their sarapes, stood apathetically about.

After a hurried stroll through the town our spirits sank. No worse, this, than a hundred other towns I had seen, but at this moment, when the way had seemed open to Mexico City, to be dumped off here was disheartening.

CHAPTER XXXII

IN A CAR OF PIGS

I

WE returned to the station. The train was still there.

The grinning brakeman spied us. "Why don't you climb on when it starts; you'll make one more station anyway."

But the conductor had been unusually decent. I didn't want to embarrass him.

Somehow, though, we had to get to Mexico City. I hunted him up again. "You've been very good, and I see your point all right. But I'm a foreigner. What can I do in a place like this without a cent? If I can only reach Mexico City, I will find some of my own people. I can get work there. But here ——"

I saw his face stiffen and added hurriedly: "You can stick us anywhere. We'll ride anywhere you say."

"The inspectors ——"

I glanced the length of the train, flat cars, box cars, half a dozen cattle cars filled with sheep, hogs, and cattle.

"We'll ride anywhere," I persisted. "Even in a car of animals. Anywhere at all."

He shook his head.

"In a car of animals," I persisted. "We'd keep out of sight. No inspector would look for us there."

He shrugged. "All right. Only keep out of sight. And if an official comes along, don't tell him I gave you leave to ride."

I hot-footed it back to Evangelina.

She was game, so once more we made a survey of the train. All the cattle cars were barred. Only a box car of pigs was open; wooden bars, like a sty, were stuck across the doorways.

The train began to move. We hurriedly clambered into this car, hauling ourselves over the bars and dropping down on the other side beside the pig tender. He was a lean, hideous Indian, with wrinkled, squinting, purblind eyes and a tuft of black hair pushed low down on his forehead, quite separate from the rest of his scalp, the result, perhaps, of some boyhood accident. This strayed tuft grew right on the temple, fantastically, like the stringy filaments of some aerial plant in a cup of rock.

We told him we were going to ride in his car. He merely grunted, his only conversation during the entire trip.

We could not sit down; the floor was too filthy; so we stood just inside the door, leaning against the wall. When the pigs crowded too closely around us, we kicked them away. They would jump squealing back among the others, and for the moment the whole end of the car would be a turmoil of agitated black hides.

The stench was terrible, so at every town we crawled out on the off-station side to lie down in the grass.

Even so, my appetite improved, and we ate up the remainder of the Silao *tortillas*, which Evangelina had carefully guarded in her *rebozo*. At one station I bought from a woman pedlar for five centavos two cups of a white liquid that I took to be milk. But the liquid proved to be something else, syrupy, sharp in flavour.

Evangelina drank hers with gusto, and also most of mine.

"It's pulque!" she laughed, pointing to the adjacent fields. "It is the fermented juice from those plants — the maguey. When fresh, it is called *aguamiel* (honey-water)



DRAWING PULQUE



A SON OF THE MAGUEY

and is very sweet. When fermented for a day, it turns milky and is then called pulque — *el licor divino*," she added, smacking her lips. "All Mexicans drink pulque. It is our national drink."

She pointed out the door of the moving train at some burros plodding along laden with pigskin bladders. "Full of pulque going to the market," she told me.

"Once upon a time there was a poor Indian girl, just like me (my father told me this story), named Xochil, which means Flower in our language. One day, when working in the fields, this girl's father became very tired and thirsty. He noticed some juice had collected in the broken hollow of the stalk of a maguey plant which had been broken off by lightning. It tasted so good, and he fell into such a pleasant sleep afterwards, that he sent Xochil with a *jarro* of it to the King of Texcoco, who ruled over that land.

"The King drank it and was so delighted with the effects and the beauty of Xochil that he made her his queen.

"And they tell another story — how our god Tetcatlapoca was playing ball with the white god Quetzalcoatl. Quetzalcoatl always won. Tetcatlapoca became so angry that he decided to play a trick on Quetzalcoatl; so he gave him enough juice from the maguey to make him drunk. Quetzalcoatl wandered away and has never been heard from since.

"So you see," said Evangelina, finishing her stories, "pulque is liable to do almost anything to a person."

II

All that afternoon we slid around the curves of the mountains, topping, at last, the one great ridge that separated us from the valley of Mexico City.

Sundown! Titanic! The vast upland valley over 7,000 feet above the level of the sea, ringed with gigantic mountains,

glimmered silver and gold and rose, from the dying sun, which was playing through the last, vanishing clouds of a thunder-storm. Long lines of rain extended from a bank of coloured cloud down to the surface of the gleaming lake of Texcoco in the ancient realm of the pulque king. Far below, a coil of living gold, gleamed Mexico City. The great towers of the cathedral poked above the plain. Far to the south-east rose the enormous snow-clad peaks, Popocatepetl — Mountain of Smoke, and Ixtaccihuatl, the Sleeping Woman — majestically pulsing with the flowing tints of the departing day — lilac, heliotrope, violet, magenta, purple — a colour pageant vibrant against the white cones. Over an arch of hills gleamed a shimmering rainbow, under which we passed as under an arch of triumph.

Soon the whole valley glistened with dark greens and browns. A thousand churches, crumbling records of the Spanish conquest, dominated a thousand upland posts above the enormous valley, where more than a million people live and labour.

It was quite dark when we skirted through the tree-clustered suburbs and quaint lanes and adobe houses to the freight terminal in Mexico City proper. We were very tired from standing up all afternoon and kicking at the pigs, and we climbed out stiffly, yet tensely nervous at having reached our goal.

Around us in the dark stretched a tangle of tracks. Lights gleamed from the rear platform of a freight train. Above us were the flaming southland stars. Beyond the walls came the clamour of the city.

Impulsively Evangelina took my hands in hers. "Good-bye," she said. Her eyes filled with tears. "We will part here. This is Mexico City."

"But why ——"

"To part will be easier for both of us. You are of another people. You will find your own friends to help you and give



XOCHIL BRINGING PULQUE TO THE KING

From a painting in the National Museum

you clothes — all you need. And I too must go among my own people. We would hinder each other. Good-bye."

"We can go up to the city together."

"No, we must part here. Now is better. Besides, I have my task — to see the President and go back to my village. You have been very good and kind. Good-bye."

I fumbled in my pocket. "Here, here are the last of our centavos. You will need them." I pressed them into her hand.

"No, no, I need nothing. This is my country. I know how to live."

In the end we divided the coins. "We shall both have something to eat," she said. "Good-bye again, dear friend," and without looking back she caught up her skirts and holding her *rebozo* tight about her head, ran across the yards.

Sorrowfully I picked up my blanket roll.

A harsh voice behind me. "Hey you!" A dapper, white-collared individual accosted me. "What are you doing here?"

I immediately pretended to know no Spanish. "Mexico City," I replied in a stupid manner, waving my hand vaguely toward the lights glimmering over the wall of the yard.

"Where did you come from?" he demanded.

I made him repeat this two or three times. He tried to make me understand by signs.

"Vera Cruz," I lied, not wishing to get the train conductor into trouble.

"Vera Cruz nothing," he answered angrily. "No trains from Vera Cruz come in here."

I shrugged and walked on.

"Hey, wait a minute. Tell me the truth. It will be better for you."

"*No comprendo. Buenas noches.*" I walked on again.

He called after me once more, but I paid no further attention to him and passed on out through the high gates into Mexico City.

CHAPTER XXXIII

MEXICO CITY

I

AT a dirty, street stand I bought some *tortillas*, stuffed with cow intestines and other nondescript meat.

A policeman directed me uptown. After so much desert travel the street I chose seemed to hum with life and light. I walked along, staring in curiously at the queer doorways. Families, huddled on mats, were eating their evening meals, drinking from big red *jarros* with true animal gusto. A poor section, evidently, but there was motion and light.

Everything to my freshly aroused senses was intriguing, colourful. Music blared from *cantinas*. Through the swinging doors, I glimpsed Indian women dancing with men in working-clothes. At one door a mestiza girl in a vivid yellow dress, a bright red flower in her sleek, black hair, seized me by the arm and tried to pull me in for a drink.

"I have no money," I told her.

Her grasp slackened. She looked at me pityingly; then her eyes wandered indifferently up the lighted street. I went on, stunned, the glow out of me.

Many times later I wandered into these cheap *cantinas* to sit at the tables and watch the bizarre life, the coarse love-making, the quick fights; even to duck spattering bullets from the revolvers of jealous, drink-excited males — an unending, entrancing spectacle of human depravity

But this first night I was an outcast, not even an observer,

and I longed for light, music; I longed to be part of life, any life, no matter how base — I wanted to belong.

I passed door after door, staring at the family scenes of a people alien to me in blood and speech and customs. Loneliness gnawed at my very entrails as I peered into the windows of the quaint shops and gay *cantinas*. No one who has not wandered in a foreign land, without clothes, without money, without friends, unable adequately to speak the language, has ever known real loneliness. Here I was, not only an alien, but poor and tattered, hungry, without a hand to help me, wretched to the point of death, a pariah.

Never had the desert filled me with such isolation. The desert takes no notice of poverty and human misery; it points no finger of scorn. Nor amidst one's own people in one's own land, no matter how terrible the circumstances, no matter how miserable and unfortunate, however close to the door of death; still one does not have the sense of bafflement that comes to the wanderer in a foreign land. In one's own country one is still held by a million invisible bonds of kinship to the human beings about him, the men and women of his own kind.

II

I kept walking till I reached a more beautiful part of the town. An equestrian statue towered within an iron enclosure in a circle of grass and flowers. Beautiful buildings ringed the plaza. Beyond stretched a boulevard — wide, imposing, glimmering with lights. On either side were wide walks, broad parkings of grass and trees, statues of public men, huge granite urns, narrower paths for horsemen. At every crossing this boulevard widened out into *glorietas*, distinguished by imposing monuments. Down the centre flowed an endless stream of autos.

I came to a blazing façade — Café Colón. I asked a chauff-

feur, sitting in a big auto that stood at the entrance, whether I was headed towards the centre of town.

He looked at me curiously. "Just where do you want to go?"

"I don't know. Into the city."

"You're going in the wrong direction." He redirected me.

I retraced my steps. But hardly had I gone half a block when the big car swung up to the curb beside me.

"Get in," said the chauffeur. "I asked my *jefe*, boss, if I could take you up."

I stepped into the machine. He swung back to the Café Colón.

I looked dazedly at him as he opened the door for me.

"My boss would like to speak to you first," he explained, and led me in through the blazing entrance, past the smartly uniformed door-keepers to a private dining-room.

Three officers were drinking together with three flashy, half-gowned women ablaze with jewels. All were tipsy. One of the women was lying in her companion's arms. His hair was tousled, his face aflame with sensuality and drink. He disengaged her to turn to me.

Just outside the door of this room, in the restaurant proper, the music blared — American jazz — couples slipped out upon the floor — loose laughter — the clink of bottles and glasses — wine, women, song, life, bedlam. — And here I stood, ragged, lousy, beard unkempt, blanket on my back.

Imagining the officer wanted only to make fun of me, I prepared to turn on my heel.

But he addressed me with unusual courtesy and good humour to ask me whence I had come.

He listened to a few words, then grew impatient.

"Poor fellow," he muttered maudlinly. "Here!" He held out a peso.

The woman, his companion, was in an even more maudlin



PULQUE SHOP



PULQUE SHOP PAINTING

state. She echoed his pity and started to pull off one of her rings to give to me.

But the officer pushed her hand roughly aside, saying to me: "Juan, my chauffeur, will see you get to the right place."

He sank back into his companion's arms, ploughing his face into her neck, and forgot all about me.

Juan and I returned to the machine. He whirled up the bright, busy streets, clipped around a number of corners, swung up to another brightly lighted entrance.

"These people will take care of you," said Juan. "This is the German Club."

He left me on the curb and swung off down the street. My beard had evidently caused him to think I was German.

What irony! His intentions had been good, but to be landed at the door of the German Club — what a beautiful travesty!

Here, too, was light and music — a dress ball. A tall, blonde, bare-headed woman, elegantly coiffured, wearing an evening cloak, stuck her silver slippers out from a limousine. A well-groomed Prussian descended after her.

I stood in the flare of the entrance lights, hypnotized by the ludicrousness of my arrival in the touring car and by the white lights. What a farce! Impressive people in evening clothes swept past me.

And I, a worm, shrinking here stupidly in the full glare, dirty, unkempt, blanket on my shoulder, feet bare, broken straw-brimmed hat low over my eyes.

An elderly gentleman in evening clothes noticed me. "*Mein Gott! Donnervetter! Schrecklichkeit!*" He seized my arm and steered me away from the entrance. "*Woher sind Sie gekommen? Mein Gott in Himmel!* Are you German?"

My German would not stand the strain of any pretence. I was about to say I was an American but on an impulse replied: "Austrian."

"*Kommen Sie mit mir,*" he commanded, asking no further questions, eager to get me away from the entrance. He stalked on ahead of me, perhaps a bit ashamed to be seen in such disreputable company.

We walked several blocks, turned into an entrance, through a dark *patio*, then ascended under a lighted arch to the second story, into a small dining-room. "This is the other club. You can eat here."

He scribbled something on a personal card and gave it to me. "When you have eaten, take this card over to the Hotel Juárez on Tacuba Street. You can sleep there to-night. To-morrow go see the consul, *nicht wahr?*"

He introduced me to a buxom *frau*. Her prominent upper lip was tinged with dark fuzz.

"*Schrecklichkeit!*" she, too, exclaimed. "Sit down, sit down, *mein armer Herr.*" She pulled out a chair at a clean oilcloth-covered table and bustled out into the kitchen.

Dishes of food showered upon me. I gulped down half a plate of thick vegetable soup; then my stomach turned. I sent the rest back.

Fish came. I nibbled at it, but it sickened me.

I wanted to eat, willed to eat, but my digestive organs, inured to starvation, shrank from food.

I finally rose from the table.

The good *frau* looked at the heaped plates. "*Was ist los? Sind Sie krank?* Why don't you eat?" She continued to stare at the plates, bewilderment in her mild blue eyes. "Eat, *mein guter Herr*, eat! You have had nothing for a long time. Eat, eat plenty."

I looked regretfully at the food, but I spoke too poor German and felt too tortured to go into a lengthy apology. I picked up a roll. "I'll take this in my pocket to eat to-morrow. To-night I cannot eat another bite."

III

The bowing, shuffling proprietor of the Hotel Juárez led me up to a little room on the roof, among the servants' quarters. These rooms were a series of wooden shacks like bath-houses. The enormous cracks between the raw boards had been covered over with yellow wrapping paper, but inquisitiveness had poked them full of holes. The doings of my neighbours on either side of the partition were plainly visible and their words were unmuffled. But in spite of a bawdy spectacle, I dropped off to sleep and did not wake till high noon the next day.

I lay there for a long time, listening to the sounds of the city — like the bourdon notes of a far off hand-organ — and to the laughing chatter of the Indian girls hanging up clothes on the roof. I splashed myself and crawled into my rags again, wondering what had happened to Evangelina.

Leisurely I strolled down the sunny streets, entranced by the bizarre *mélange* of colour. I had a peso and ten centavos, and I meditated on how best to spend it. Five centavos I invested in peanuts and walked on past the post office into the shady Alameda, the central park, to eat them.

Something in this Mexican scene calmed my nerves, banishing all fear of the future. I no longer felt the pariah, the outcast. I had enough money for a night's lodging, perhaps for two nights. The sun shone luxuriously upon me.

The mass of semi-tropical vegetation and the soft green lawns, the delightful bronzes, the paths laid out in French style, the plashing fountains, all was lyric, soothing. I gave myself sensuously to the lover-like caress of the balmy air and the beauty of the deep shadows over rich green grass. I drowsed amidst the calls of the bootblacks, of the venders of oranges, candy, and ices, and the chirrupings of the canaries.

After the many months in the wilderness of desert and mountain this city showered forth the mythical glory of Kubla Khan's paradise. Fringing the park rose buildings, the stately unfinished National Theatre, churches, arcades, tiled palaces, bell towers. On the wings of the soft air came the constant boom of mellow bells; beautiful women passed by; carriages and autos rolled down the avenue.

I began to dream dreams, extravagant dreams. I would stay here in this city of the Aztecs and the Conquistadores and live and achieve success. I would make money. I would enjoy life and win women, the beautiful women who passed me by.

Fantastic dreams! I stared down at my *huaraches*, my wounded feet (the sores had stuck fast to the sheets the night before); I fingered my dirty, torn rags. My bare knee showed. One elbow was seeing daylight. I meditated on my unspeakable straw hat, my unkempt beard, my itchiness.

But some day! Some day! Chimerical necromancy — some day! Some day this city would be my oyster. Some day this strange hodge-podge of Spanish, French, American and Indian, this brutal contrast of primitiveness and refinement, this place of towers and bells and beautiful women, would yield up the secret of its charm and delight to me. I gave myself over to voluptuous visions, shot through by salacious pictures of the Bacchanalian revelries at the Café Colón. I floated on my erotic fancies. —

Now once more I wandered through the city, down along the bizarre streets, with their teeming life, through the market, cascading with fruit and flowers, and vegetables, and cloth goods, humming with song and bargaining and jest and beggars. At a municipal wash-stand women were scrubbing clothes; ice-cream venders went by with their freezers balanced on their heads, calling their wares in thin musical tones. I peered in at the flowering *patios*, cluttered with clothes-

lines and babies and snooping curs; past open-air meat markets, thick with flies and dust; and open-air kitchens, where thick stews simmered in huge, red terra-cotta bowls over glowing charcoal; past excited games of lotto; past rows of open "cribs," women plying their trade, even in the heat of midday, pulling office workers in on their way home to dinner.

I circled back to the warm, lazy, scented Alameda, with its quiet plashing fountains and enveloping shade, content to bask in the warm sensation of the moment.

CHAPTER XXXIV

SHELTER AND CLOTHES

I

AN American lad sat down on my bench. He kept eyeing me curiously. At last his inquisitiveness overflowed.

"You're in a hell of a state, aren't you?" he said in good Yankee English.

We talked. He himself wanted a confidant, anyone who could speak English. He had come down from the States a couple of months back and was lonesome. Having been unable to find any work, he had been reduced to living in a cheap Casa de Huéspedes, where he shared a room with another American boy.

"My pal is away for a week," he said, "doing a repairing job on a tractor at a ranch out of town. If you want his bed till he comes back, you're darn welcome. My name's Tom Horner."

We went over to the boarding-house, a mean place on the corner of Nuevo México and Dolores Streets.

The assurance of a bed, even though for only a week, rolled a big weight off my mind.

I went back into the street to prowls around, feeling more gay and care-free than ever.

The lights had begun to blossom out. What should I buy for supper? Passing a dingy Chinese café back of the Cathedral, I noticed three ragged street waifs sitting on the curb. I sat down beside them.

"Where do you sleep?" I asked.

"On the streets, four or five of us and our dogs." One of the boys indicated two curs snooping around a drain. "We cover ourselves with *carteles* — posters. We tear them off the billboards. In the day we beg our food in front of the cafés or steal it in the markets."

A phrase from Ingersoll popped into my head: "If you only have a dollar in the world, spend it like a prince." And on an impulse I said to the boys:

"Come on in with me."

The four of us — a most outlandish crew, followed by the two curs — trapsed inside. I looked at a smudged sign on the wall:

Coffee 15c

Sweetbread 5c

One peso would buy four cups of coffee and two pieces of sweetbread each, and I should still have five centavos over for peanuts the next morning.

A merry meal we made of it. The little street arabs were shy and distrustful at first, not quite believing that manna ever dropped from heaven. But soon we were laughing over every trifle and making fun of the little Indian waitress, who tried to maintain a great superiority over such riff-raff as we. The boys ate ravenously. Two of them scrupulously divided every crumb with the dogs. As for me I never spent a dollar with more gusto in my life — to dispense rather than receive, after having been a beggar for so many months, restored my dignity and self-respect and restimulated my feelings of human friendliness.

II

On my way back to the Casa de Huéspedes I stopped a gentleman passing by to direct me to Nuevo México Street.

He did not answer immediately, but stared at me curiously, his two hands spread flat on his white waistcoat. Then he answered, not in Spanish, but in perfect English: "Your street is three blocks south. But what under the sun has happened to you?"

I told him briefly.

"Have you no money at all?"

"Five centavos for to-morrow's breakfast."

He laughed. "Come with me. Perhaps I can be of assistance to you."

In about five minutes we reached a stately building — the Chamber of Deputies.

"I am a member," he explained, as he led me into a sumptuous waiting-room. "Be seated," — indicating a carved, leather-upholstered chair. "I shall not be long."

I felt most embarrassed and out of place in this gorgeously appointed *salon*, but in spite of my tatterdemalion appearance no one paid more than passing attention to me. Self-important officials of the realm bustled in or out, or sat earnestly conversing in the corners.

Half an hour passed; then my impromptu friend — Avelaneda by name — came back with a strikingly tall, elderly gentleman at his side, to whom he immediately introduced me — "Deputy Canalejos."

The new-comer bowed, shook hands gravely, with that phenomenal courtesy that is ever a part of the Mexican, especially when dealing with strangers. I might have been a diplomat covered with insignia rather than a ragged pauper.

He invited me to come to see him and tell him about the United States, offering to help me in any way possible.

Avellaneda led me to his home, about four blocks distant. He immediately put his wardrobe at my disposal: underwear, socks, suit — everything except shirt and hat, which could not be made to fit.

Bathed, dressed, beard trimmed, finger-nails clean, I felt a new man, ready to face the world. True, my shoes pinched my wounded feet with excruciating pain; I was wearing the same faded, dirty, khaki shirt, but with a tie it was fairly presentable.

III

In the dining-room I was introduced to the lady of the house and her two daughters — Avellaneda's relatives with whom he resided when attending the sessions of the Chamber. The lady, Doña Teresa, his cousin, a portly widow dressed in black taffeta and bedecked with ostentatious jewelry, appeared good-natured and kind. Her daughters were both in the late teens.

Consuelo, the elder, was a sweet, moody, olive-skinned girl, with almost classic features and large soulful eyes. A tall, scarlet comb gleamed in her jet-black hair and two blood-red ear-rings dangled against her soft cheeks.

Guadalupe — Lupe for short — was taller, lithier than her sister. Her darting black eyes glistened with fun and challenge and cruelty, her taunting mouth betrayed the flare and deviltry of her Spanish blood. She wore a fern frond in her fluffy, wild hair and heavy bracelets of beaten gold on her slender wrists. A shimmering pink dress set off her slim figure as vividly as the soft black outlined Consuelo's rounded curves.

At first the meal for me was a trying experience, for they all gazed at me curiously, with the frank, open gaze of the

Latin (we northerners cultivate the glance), which makes no attempt to hide its interest. I felt myself on display, but soon this feeling wore off with the graciousness and ease accompanying every word and act of my hosts.

"Are the buildings large in New York?" asked Guadalupe, rather demurely.

"Rather," and I mentioned the Woolworth tower, and the express elevators and bridges and sky-scraper and all the rest of it.

"And are the hotels just as large?" The same demure tone, a little twist of smile.

"Why, yes." And I expounded upon the Ritz, the McAlpin and the Astor.

"And are the cars on the trains larger and more commodious?"

"Why, yes, sometimes," and I told her of Pullman accommodations.

She began to laugh. "Let me tell you a story. An American was once travelling with two Mexicans here in Mexico.

"'In my country,' boasted the American, 'the trains are much larger.'

"'Si, señor,' replied his Mexican friends politely.

"They arrived at a small town. 'Pooh,' sneered the American, 'in my country the buildings are much larger. Everything in my country is very much larger.'

"'Si, señor,' replied the Mexicans politely.

"They came to a hotel, a miserable little small-town hotel.

"'Do you mean to tell me this is a hotel?' exclaimed the American. 'In my country the hotels are very large!'

"'Si, señor,' said the Mexicans most politely, more politely than usual, for they were now becoming very weary of the American's boasting.

"In the hotel lobby one of the Mexicans saw a huge turtle — we often have them about for pets.

"'Let us put it in the American's bed,' he suggested.

"So they put it in the American's bed.

"That night the turtle seized one of the American's big toes in his mouth.

"The American jumped out of the bed screaming, dragging the turtle with him. The two Mexicans ran in and freed his toe.

" 'What is this terrible monster?' cried the American, dancing around on one foot.

" 'That!' said one of the Mexicans politely, most politely, pointing to the turtle waddling off, 'that, why, that's nothing, nothing at all, only an ordinary bedbug. Are the bedbugs much bigger in your country?'

"The American cast a sidelong glance at the vanishing turtle. 'No, no, as I recall vaguely, the bedbugs are slightly smaller.'

" ' *Si, señor,*' replied the Mexicans politely and went back to bed."

"What a story to tell at dinner!" protested Consuelo.

But the ice was effectively broken, and I spent one of the most enjoyable hours of my life at that dinner table, forgetting the recent hardships and my poverty and my concern for the future. I tasted the wit and grace of the Mexican meal, its leisureliness, its gaiety. In few places in the world do the people have a wit so nimble as do the Mexicans, which, though at times bitingly sarcastic, is always sheathed in a courtesy so kindly that the barb is extracted almost as soon as it enters. I have come to love the Mexican meal, whether spent at the friendly board of a gracious host or at the little restaurant table, with its aftermath of coffee, smoke, conversation, and leisurely dreams.

When I left that evening, Avellaneda jokingly asked me which of the two girls I wished to marry. "Come up any time," he urged. "I'm glad you have a place to sleep, and if you get hungry there is always a meal waiting you here. Look me up some time to-morrow at the Chamber of Deputies."

CHAPTER XXXV

THE CASA DE HUESPEDES

I

WHEN I reached my Casa de Huéspedes, my room-mate rubbed his eyes.

"How'd you do it?" he gasped. "What second-hand, Jew shop did you rob?"

I related my adventure.

"Talk about luck," he returned. "Some people sure land in clover. Now all you need is a shirt and collar to look like the king of Denmark himself."

"And a hat ——"

"Shirt and collar I have — if they fit. What size? — Hunky-dory. Here's one, a little worn, but it will establish you respectable — As for a hat — I have an old, soiled auto cap. That'll be better than your busted straw dicer."

He planted it on my head and stood off to look at me. "Holy mackerel, if one didn't see the grease spots on the cap, you'd look like a European count — the beard and all. My God, you're a pippin! Now what are you going to do to earn a living?"

"Blessed if I know. Something will turn up."

"Why don't you teach English? You can get a few classes, and you can live here in this Casa de Huéspedes, damn' cheap — sixty pesos a month. Teaching English, you can make that twirling your fingers. That's what I'd do if I knew enough Spanish. But you know the lingo well enough to get along."

"But how does one get classes?"

"Go after them. Everybody here is *loco* to learn English — from the stenos up to the business men and the lawyers. Just make the round of the office buildings. Don't hide your fluent light under a bushel."

"Avellaneda might help me there."

"Sure thing; why not? To-morrow you can get out and rustle."

"Only this cap ——"

"What's the diff? You don't wear it indoors; you can double it up and stick it in your pocket when you enter."

The next morning my room-mate invited me to take breakfast with him in the dining-room of the Casa.

The landlady, Doña Concha Seguí, was a middle-aged widow, thin and angular as a board — dirty brown hair — sunken cheeks. She looked mortally ill; her eyes gleamed hectically. Indeed she announced straight off with a prodigious sigh that she suffered from kidney trouble.

Tom told me to explain my difficulties to her. She listened sympathetically.

Two children came rushing in — Sandro, a bright lad of eleven, a bit of the devil lurking in him, and a charming pink and cream girl of fourteen — Carmen — already turning plump.

"I have two other children," explained the widow, "but they are grown up. My elder daughter, Elizabeta, is nineteen. She's married to a German doctor. I shall have them over to dinner some time soon, and you can meet them. Also I have a boy of twenty-one, Manuel, a fine chap."

The servant-girl, an unusually beautiful mestiza, who was just bringing in a plate of oatmeal, sniggered out loud.

"What are you laughing at, Henrieta?" demanded Doña Concha with some asperity.

"*Si, señora*, your son is very fine and works so hard, so

hard." She set down the plate of oatmeal, crossed her hands over her snug breasts, and rolled her eyes with a saintly expression.

"He's not supposed to work," replied Doña Concha with dignity and without heat.

Henrieta turned to me. Her dancing eyes sparkled. "He works with the bottle." She pulled her hair awry and mimicked a man slightly intoxicated, holding a bottle.

"He'll get over that," returned Doña Concha complacently.

This son, Manuel, evidently slept in a room partitioned off from the dining-room, for Henrieta now hammered on the wooden wall. "Get up, lazy-bones, get up."

"Leave him alone!" protested Doña Concha.

"You see," whispered my friend Tom to me in English. "Manuel is making love to Henrieta. Most servant-girls don't mind, you know, and that's why Doña Concha is so easy-going with her. Manuel gives his mother a hell of a bawling out every time she says a harsh word to Henrieta, so that Henrieta is the queen of the roost. A Mexican mother always kowtows to the eldest son. Everything he does is law."

Henrieta continued to knock on the partition. "Get up, lazy-bones."

A groan from the other side. "What time is it?"

"Two o'clock in the afternoon," announced Henrieta mischievously. "Get up, or you'll miss your dinner."

"Let him sleep," protested Doña Concha in a low voice. "He didn't get to bed last night until two."

"And he worked so hard," mocked Henrieta, "with the bottles, and goodness knows what else."

Feet thudded to the floor beyond the partition.

"God, I'm sleepy," came in a typical morning-after voice.

An old woman, another guest in the Casa, shuffled into the room. She sat down with a nervous smirk and began drink-

ing hot milk with musical rhythm. She was a funny old creature with toothless gums and red eyes and an old-fashioned, black bodice, streaked with egg stains. She never said anything except once to make lewd sallies about sex and to say that she was a grandmother and that her son paid her bill at the Casa. She kept wiping her mouth with the back of her shrivelled hand.

Presently the son came out, no shirt, suspenders dangling down from his trousers, hair tousled, eyes heavy with sleep and red from dissipation.

"Anything to eat?" he growled.

"Anything you want, darling," said his mother. "Poor boy," she added.

Then he stared at the table. "You're eating breakfast! I thought it was afternoon. Damn that wench!" and he shuffled back into his room. The bed creaked. Presently loud snores over the partition announced him again dead to the world.

CHAPTER XXXVI

A NEW HAT

I

ABOUT ten o'clock I went over to the Chamber of Deputies. I had no collar buttons, so I had not yet put on my collar and tie. Avellaneda seemed pleased that I had looked him up, and remarked about my shirt, insisting on my taking fifty centavos to buy what I needed.

I explained my desire to teach English. He promised me a letter to the head of one of the military schools.

My cuff links and collar buttons cost me twenty centavos, leaving me thirty-five centavos for the morrow. I put on my collar and tie, and looked at myself in the mirror of one of the show-windows of a haberdasher's. Except for my cap, I now felt quite satisfied with my general appearance.

On down the street I came upon a sign advertising the Williams' School in Tacubaya and on an impulse decided to go out and ask for a position.

Inquiry revealed Tacubaya to be a suburb — round fare, forty centavos, five centavos more than I possessed. On foot the distance was a good three hours. It was now eleven thirty. I would get there at two thirty.

I set out, walking down Avenida Juárez and out the Paseo de la Reforma, the beautiful boulevard upon which I had stumbled that first night. The morning was like a song, clear and balmy. I passed the Café Colón, its crystal front glistening in the sun. At each *glorieta* of the boulevard rose the

stately monuments, one to Columbus and a *memento mori* to Cuauhtemoc. Of a guard lounging near the latter I asked about Cuauhtemoc.

His eyes kindled. "Cuauhtemoc? He was an emperor of the Aztecs and was tortured by the Spaniards. Here you can see how they burned off his feet," and he pointed to a copper relief set at the base of the monument.

My own feet pained me. I sympathized vividly with his fate.

"And why did they torture him?" I asked.

"To make him tell where his gold was hidden," replied the Indian. "The Spaniards wanted gold. All foreigners come to Mexico to get gold. They do not love us and they do not care for our country. They all come to get gold, only gold. They steal our gold and leave us poor, starving."

The figure of the Aztec emperor towered above us, cape flung back over his powerful shoulder, spear raised in a mighty gesture — a noble piece of art.

"If you had the spirit of Cuauhtemoc ——" I began.

"Yes, but now we are a broken people. Some day, perhaps ——"

At the end of the avenue, among the massed trees of a high hill, rose the imposing Castle of Chapultepec, the summer home of the presidents of Mexico, once the site of the summer palace of the Aztec emperors.

I swung into the long, shady road that led along the edge of Chapultepec Park, glimpses of which strongly reminded me of Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, only here vegetation was more luxuriant and vast *ahuehuete* trees, planted in the time of the Montezumas, towered high above the paths.

II

Tacubaya proved a sleepy little town clambering from a small plaza over the summit of a hill and sprawling down into a canyon. The Williams' School was situated on a high mound overlooking the town, high buildings in high walls.

A porter opened the gate for me and directed me to the office.

Here a young Englishman greeted me with polite prosi-ness and listened respectfully. Mr. Williams, his father, it transpired, was away in the United States. I should have to wait his return to make formal application. However, he would consult the head-master to see if anyone was needed temporarily. While we were talking, his eyes fell upon my greasy cap, which I had neglected to stuff into my pocket. I flushed, but no change of expression passed over his smooth-shaven, beef-nourished face.

He went out. I looked at my cap in mortification. Then my eyes fell upon a rack with four hats.

I looked again at my greasy cap.

I looked at the four hats.

I went over to the rack and tried on the best of the lot — a new, green fedora. It fitted perfectly.

I looked at the closed door through which Mr. Williams had gone, then stuffed my cap into my pocket.

When Mr. Williams came out again, I was standing with the fedora clasped behind my back.

He told me to come back in a couple of months.

Once outside the door, I stuffed the green fedora loosely under my coat and put on my cap again.

The porter let me out with a low bow.

Down a side lane I replaced my cap with the hat.

CHAPTER XXXVII

JOBS

I

AT the foot of the hill I stumbled upon the Tacubaya market, a rambling place. Here, and for blocks on end, the Indians displayed their wares — a thousand bizarre objects of a thousand hues cascaded over curb and gutter. Pottery, corn, meat, chickens, basketry of the most beautiful designs and brilliant colouring, sarapes, *rebozos*, clothing, hardware — great stacks of rusted locks, hinges, nails, and screws, gleaned from the very dumps — gaudily decorated stands of candies and jellos, impromptu lunch-rooms, where Indians guzzled chili-hot stews.

A loud yelling announced a gambling-place, a sort of lotto, played on coloured squares with kernels of corn.

A barefoot Indian, a live turkey hanging over his shoulder, accosted me politely: "Do you want to buy a turkey?"

I shook my head. The thought of turkey revived my thoughts of food. I was hungry.

Politely he implored me to buy the bird, which he assured me was fresh and tender and cheap. In spite of my repeated repulses, he followed me all over the market, regaling my ears with succulent tales of how good a turkey tasted when roasted. He was sure I wanted the turkey. I told him I had no wife and no place to cook it and no money and never ate turkey anyway. He persisted.

"Buy it *por caridad* — for charity," was his climactic argument.

At first his insistence gave me pride and self-assurance as to my appearance of affluence. But soon the turkey began squawking and ruffling up its feathers.

At last I grew annoyed. In my pockets thirty-five centavos, my stomach empty; to be tagged about by a man with a fat live turkey — this was burlesque raised to the apotheosis of the comic, but my sense of humour was rapidly evaporating. His plump turkey made my mouth water. It embroidered memory with gustatory visions of Thanksgiving feasts around the groaning board. He refused to be repulsed.

I finally turned upon him angrily.

He instantly excused himself politely for his persistence, but immediately after laughed derisively at my irritation.

At a curb fruit stand, where oranges, zapotes, guayabas, and bananas were clustered in little *montones* for sale, I bought two bananas for five centavos, and at an adjacent stand five centavos' worth of peanuts. The *dueño* of this little business filled one of my pockets from a wooden measuring-scoop. He heaped the scoop high and then for good measure flung a couple of extra peanuts into my pocket along with best wishes.

Thus provided, I trudged back to Mexico City, regaling myself on the bananas and peanuts — a plenitude of calories, all for ten centavos.

My satisfaction was only marred by the excruciating pain my wounded feet now gave me.

II

But those peanuts cost me dear. In one of my side pockets, unknown to me, was a small hole; a number of peanuts slipped down through this into the lining. That night I hung the coat over a low chair. In the morning, when I got up, I

found that a rat had chewed a large hole in my coat to get at the nuts.

Excitedly I put on the coat to look at it in the mirror. I literally pulled my hair with chagrin. The hole was right in front — the most prominent part of the coat. No wonder primitive peoples believe in the evil eye; I was almost constrained to think this retributive justice for stealing the hat the day before.

The landlady of the Casa volunteered to darn the hole. The result was not particularly happy, but I was grateful, for I well knew that a new suit would not be mine for a long time to come. From this time on, when I went out to look for a job and had to meet people whom it was necessary to impress, I used surreptitiously to hold my hand over the corner of the coat, doubling it under slightly when I sat down. No one who has not experienced it can fully appreciate the chagrin and humiliation of such a subterfuge.

III

I hustled around for classes. I visited the head of the military school and followed up every minute clue, but landed nothing. All this week I lived on exactly five centavos' worth of peanuts a day. Somehow I could not bring myself to visit the Avellanedas' and front the two *señoritas* as a beggar. Foolish, perhaps, yet all through my experiences I never once begged a meal unless driven to it by the actual torment of starvation, preferring to steal rather than beg.

The worst of all this running about was the condition of my feet. The sores were very slow in healing up. During the night they would get better, but the irritation of walking all day in tight shoes would rub them into open pustulation and inflammation again.

On Saturday, Tom received a letter from his room-mate,

who told him he should not be back for some time to come. On an impulse Tom himself decided to leave. He made up his mind to go down to Tampico — he had just enough for fare — on the hope of getting work on the oil-fields.

Once more I faced the street, with no money, no job, and no particular hopes.

The day before Tom left, the landlady of the Casa gave him a farewell dinner, to which she invited me, and her daughter and her German son-in-law as special guests.

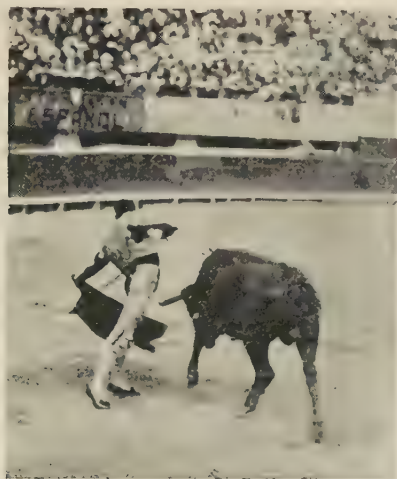
Mexicans love to feast and this was a jolly gathering in spite of its dingy and bizarre setting — three kinds of wine, pulque, liqueurs, *mole de guajolote*, Mexico's most famous delicacy, roast turkey sauced in twenty highly spiced condiments, maguey worms fried in butter, and a number of other tidbits.

The German doctor, I noticed, drew the line at the maguey worms, though I found them exquisite in flavour. The doctor was a spectacled little man, quiet and bald and smooth all over as a hazel-nut. He spoke gravely, weightily, and seldom.

Doña Elizabeta, his wife, Doña Concha's daughter, was his exact opposite — tall, slender, graceful as a lily, free of speech and movement, with a decided Creole flare.

A diversion in the course of the dinner was provided by little Sandro, who related with great gusto the details of a bullfight he had seen the day before. He became so excited that he jumped up from the table to enact the scene. He seized up his napkin for a miniature cape, his knife as a matador's blade, and sparred and thrust and side-stepped with such a fierce expression on his childish face that everybody roared. His dignity quite affronted, he sullenly returned to his meal, muttering that we all ought to be carved up.

Over the coffee-cups, when the wine began taking effect, the talk became personal, and the landlady, knowing that I had no money and didn't know where to turn after Tom left,



A BULL-FIGHT



THE COUP DE GRÂCE

invited me to remain at her Casa, assuring me that she shouldn't mind waiting for payment until I got on my feet again. Besides she was thinking of having little Sandro and Carmen take English lessons; she offered to pay me thirty pesos a month for three classes weekly.

"And my wife would like lessons," said the Doctor. "That would mean twenty pesos more."

Thus I had all but fifteen pesos of my board and room assured.

IV

When the others left and the children had romped off, Doña Concha invited me into her parlor for a further chat.

We talked about Mexico; she showed me the family album, and then — inevitable of inevitables — she produced a notebook filled with poetry she had written. Inviting me to sit beside her on the lounge, she began reading in a high voice, looking up after each poem for my approval.

I didn't understand half of it, but nodded encouragingly.

As she read on, her voice became more melting, her glances more languorous, her face more flushed with the wine she had drunk.

Finally she laid down the book. "Have you a *novia* — a sweetheart? — No?"

She pointed to a full-length, gaudily framed, enlarged photograph of herself on the opposite wall.

"At your service," she announced.

I pretended not to understand. At the same time I saw my classes vanishing and myself on the street once more.

But she was getting drowsier and drowsier from the wine. Her head finally sank on my shoulder, and before I knew it, she was snoring away at a great rate. I disengaged myself and let her head down on a pillow.

Neither of us ever mentioned the incident again, and we remained good friends.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

DOLORES STREET

I

I SPENT six months at the Casa and for the first three months never paid a cent, beyond giving classes to the children. At best the pension was a squalid place with its odd assortment of people — my angular landlady, the toothless, ribald grandmother, the two sun-bright children who came romping into my room for their lessons, the numerous other boarders desperately clinging to the lower fringe of life. But squalid though the Casa was, it was home to me, and my feelings rooted down into its very squalor with real attachment.

In the room next to mine was a dashing young free-lance journalist, who flung himself in and out like a whirlwind — better, like a pebble on the water, he sent out disturbing ripples at every skip. Contact with him was entirely too electrifying. His *novia* visited him once a week, usually on a Saturday afternoon, a pretty, slim girl, a regular clinging-vine type, who worked in the post office. One Saturday, hearing a great pounding at his door, I ran out to find that some of his friends, who knew very well he was locked in with his *amor*, were shouting to him with great glee, demanding to see him immediately.

In the two rooms in the far corner of the corridor were a brother and sister. He said he was a student in the engineering school, but rumour had it that he was a procurer

for her and lived off her earnings, for people had seen supposed friends of his slip into her room and stay for a long time.

Half way down the hall was a tall, blonde prostitute, a tired, dragged-out woman, whom Manuel, the worthless son of the house, visited when he tired of Henrieta, the waitress, and his other flames.

Just above the stairs, in a close-like room was a middle-aged, genteel woman, who cooked on a tin *brasero* and perfumed the hall with cooked onions. Next door to her was a thread-bare Socialist lawyer, one Santibañez who propagandized us at the dinner table and handed about little red leaflets. He peered at the world through his thick spectacles and saved it by holding frequent loud sessions with his friends, discussing political tactics far into the night. These sessions greatly annoyed the uncommunicative Armenian pedlar who slipped like a shadow through the dim corridor, a sallow, moustached man with a whole front row of gleaming gold teeth.

Then there was the thin but pretty actress of a travelling show that made all the hick towns about the country. Business was bad on account of the disturbed condition of the rural districts, and she was doing a song-and-dance act in one of the cheaper movie houses, just managing to exist by piecing out with judicious visits of "friends."

Also, the imposing gentleman in spats, always sleek and clean-shaven, one of the *coyotes* who made a living selling exchange, buying up revolutionary paper money and getting it bought up by the Government through his numerous political friends. He was rather mysterious in voice and manner, rarely occupied his room, and was always shadowed by an emaciated youth with a squeaky voice. He was obviously a "fairy," a "forty-oner," as they say in Mexico.

There were two musicians, pleasant boys, who played in

the Café Europea on Avenida Madero; a travelling salesman, unctuous and gabby; and an ex-priest.

The most magnificent corner room of the house was occupied by a retired sea-captain, who was now "the inventor." After I had been in the Casa for about a month, he invited me into his room to talk "business." He did not take me in with him, but made a special appointment, for three o'clock of a Tuesday afternoon. He tipped the pock-marked chambermaid to be in his room at the time and open the door for me. He was seated before an Oliver type-writer at a desk littered with maps and papers, and was in his customary house attire, a blue coat with tin buttons and a sailor's cap. He sat very straight and stared at me from large blue eyes under thinly thatched brows. A massive, long head, he had, and a pointed, brown jaw. He announced that I was foolish to waste my time giving classes when I could make a hundred thousand pesos by marketing his invention. He talked to me in a booming, serious voice. His speech was interlarded with sea expletives, which popped out in sudden roars, after which he would pause to note their effect upon me. He gesticulated with a hand that had lost all its fingers; the thumb stuck up uncannily from the mangled, pulpy palm. His invention, the details of which he never gave me, was a means by which a fleet could be made invisible. He claimed to have initiated negotiations with the Japanese Government, but he had a great love for the United States and did not want to see this remarkable invention pass into the hands of a maritime rival of the "Great Colossus of the North." He would be willing to sell his rights for a million pesos. All I had to do was to bring him into proper relations with American capitalists who would be interested in pushing the matter before the American Government. In case results were forthcoming, my commission would be exactly one hundred thousand pesos. He kept me in his room for three hours, completely be-

witched by his grandiloquent manner, his gleaming eyes, his gesticulating thumb, and his intense seriousness. I finally crept out, weakly assuring him I would give the matter my earnest consideration, and thereafter dodged the old loon like poison.

The porter, in his ragged uniform, added his misery to the heterogeneous tenantry. He hobbled around on one wooden leg — the original had been shot off in the revolution — bent double by rheumatism, whining repulsively. He cleaned the lower stairs and vestibule to the street and lived off the *propinas* given to him for opening the door after ten o'clock at night. He slept on the cement, wrapped up in an old army-blanket, just inside the door, so that he could jump up to open it.

Most of these ins and outs were told to me by the simpering slut of a pock-marked chambermaid, the one who admitted me so formally to the sea-captain's room. As she mopped up the tiles of my room, she insisted upon telling me every intimate and vulgar detail of the various lives that came under her ken.

All this grime, dirt, poverty, wretchedness, both physical and spiritual, of the subterreanean crew that manned the Casa, strung the heart-strings taut and cast its darkening shadow upon hope. But I learned to love the place, and also the view from my side balcony which opened out upon Dolores Street — the Street of Sorrows.

Singularly appropriate the name, for in this débris-heaped street stalked all life's baffling sorrows and tragedies. The battle for existence here was primitive and keen, though carried on with a vagrant indifference, an ironic fatalism. Indeed, hunger and happiness often ran arm in arm. Want, though, was omnipresent. Want dogged the heels of the ragged beggar woman, she of the snow-white hair and shrivelled, naked breasts. One of her bare feet is twisted and

gnarled and she limps. Her querulous voice, writhing from her toothless mouth, implores charity from each callous hearer. "*Dios le pagará* — God will repay you," she whines. And hunger is also the urge behind the yellow-shawled, stolid Indian woman who all day cries monotonously in her high-pitched voice: "*Naranjas, naranjas dulces* — oranges, sweet oranges." Hunger is at the elbow of the copper Aztecan with the ochre-coloured sarape who sells sugar-cane from a tepee-shaped stack; beside the ragged *niño* who pipes with rasping immaturity: "*Dulces, dulces.*" Even the lean, half-starved cur snaps the bread from the fingers of the unwary street waifs. And Hunger — your greatest handiwork, is She, the Scarlet *Señorita* — trim ankle, slender, rounded body, curving face, snapping black eyes — who takes good men and bad, with her charms, for her feet take hold on Sheol.

Yet, despite all this mess of ragged poverty and lust, Happiness finds her way. She teaches the stoic pedlars to play and jest during their interminable hours of waiting; leads the clear-skinned girl behind the candy stand to laugh and flirt with some eager *caballero*; hurries a newly-wed, in fresh, housewifely eagerness, basket on her arm, to make her purchases at the near-by market for a home not yet grown stale and sordid; sends another damsel with hooded head and downcast eyes into the chime-calling cathedral; teaches the lean peon, sarape and rope slung across the shoulder, the way into the *cantina* to forget his misery in the smack of pulque and the rollicking thrum of the marimba.

Dolores Street, one of the most colourful kaleidoscopic, most assiduously idle, most poignantly sad streets I have known. The changing scenes of this street continually rise before my eyes: the early market-hour bustle and delicate morning shadows; the steady forenoon hum; the glowing heat; the silent, sun-washed siesta hours; the slow afternoon revival; the sudden mutter of a tropic storm; the scurry to

cover as the blinding sheet of water swirls down upon gutter and culvert and darkens the soft-tinted façades of the buildings; the early flash of lights in the growing dusk; the wizened gnome-like figures running past with flickering tapers; the laughter from the cheap Chinese cafés; the provocations of street women; the nine o'clock rattle as the last shop shutters are rung down; and all night the fresh, upland breeze sending its healing balm, and the quiet stars blazing as they only do in the southlands — then, even in the Street of Sorrows, there is peace.

CHAPTER XXXIX

REACHING OUT

I

MONTHS sped by. Letters came from Ralph in Culiacán. He was getting along well, but was eager to come to Mexico City. He always mentioned Josefina — and her softness and pink frills always jumped back into my eye — she was still unhappy; more eager than ever to get away. I received several imploring letters from her. These I answered, but was in no position to help her in any way.

Suddenly Ralph sent a mysterious letter saying he had got into some sort of jam and was about to head for Mexico City. I scared up money for a telegram, telling him, instead, to return to the United States. In a long letter I explained my actual penurious circumstances and argued against a solitary trip over the Sierras. I did not hear from him again until he was back in California. As for poor Josefina, I have never learned to this day what her fate was, though I wrote to her a number of times.

As the months hurried by I obtained classes, healed my feet, bought new clothes, paid off my generous landlady. Even at the end of three months I was able to save up enough to invite Avellaneda and his relatives out to the Toreo to hear *Carmen* under the open, shimmering sky. And what a *Carmen*! And what a glorious spring day!

Guadalupe was vivacity personified — a dancing, coruscating light of prismatic colours — gay, jaunty, flirtatious, invit-

ing (and my feet were half caught in the net) ; Consuelo still a blooming camelia — a naïve, Catholic purity to her, the innocence of one who prays regularly, goes to mass in her black silk tapalo, inhales the rich incense rising from the altars, and listens to holy music with sad, sweet voluptuousness. Doña Teresa beamed upon the occasion and occupied her seat in the *sombra* like a dignified, self-important matron of the old régime, and Avellaneda, quite excited over my sudden achievement of respectability, was quite tickled that his judgment had been good.

In all these months a new and richer existence blossomed out for me, more satisfying than any I had ever known, I began to write. Since earliest childhood life had presented rhythms and moods and colours to me, but I had always been ashamed to reveal this inner symphony. Yet I was eager to set forth my fancies in words. As a boy I used to dream in the California hills and write out the songs that rang in my ears. But I was ashamed of the things I wrote, showing them to no one. As I grew up, this compulsion to write grew stronger, more urgent ; yet there was something in the staid, middle-class *milieu* that strangled this urge. I became caught up in the American herd gospel : success, college friends, a conventional engagement, everything led me to a job in a shipping-office instead of to a garret of books and cobwebs and poetry. But here in Mexico there was no herd. I was outside the herd, looking aloof at its queer, unreasoning antics. Now I found myself freed by all my experience in Mexico from a "compulsion for success," for position, money-making, respectability, pose. I had touched bottom and the elemental realities of life. I had, in fact, at last chosen life instead of success. And Mexico freed me from an even greater curse than standardization — fear. Fear is the great strangler of free and bold living. But one who has been among the beggars and the outcasts, who has looked upon

both the ugly and the beautiful animal functions or human existence, with no veil of false decency and respectability between, has no reason to fear. My experience had been like a sweeping fire that had burnt away the clutter of dead growth that is falsely planted by society in every young heart. Fear disappeared — fear of poverty, fear of opinion, fear of love, fear of emotion, fear of the future, fear of life. Life, even with its most terrible sorrows and disasters, was something to be loved and accepted — even with its ironic tragi-comedy of ultimate death. Mexico was teaching me all this, teaching me the true taste of life, to give myself to life more gracefully, to abandon myself to leisure, to human contact, to love, to imagination. Yet at the same time it gradually built up in me a respect for tradition without making me a slave to tradition. Here at every hand were the evidences of civilizations old before America was founded; and I learned to love the warp and woof of the past. And Mexico taught me my first true lessons in æsthetics; it stimulated and awakened in me as never before the keen pleasurable life of the senses: form, colour, rhythm — things omnipresent in Mexico, part of the handicraft heritage; part of the Spanish heritage, quiveringly alive in the very air one breathes. And these impressions I began to put on paper.

I began to live better, take trips, make friends. I had secured enough teaching to meet all my expenses and allow for some surplus. My feet had healed, and the fresh, balmy, upland climate was keeping me in fine fettle. I moved to a better room in a better neighbourhood, though not without great regret at parting with my generous landlady and the numerous acquaintances of the Casa.

II

Some weeks later I received a letter from an American, George Poltiol, who had seen in *El Excelsior*, my advertisements for classes. He wrote that he had been teaching English here for some time and should like to make my acquaintance for the purpose of talking over the establishment of a school.

Two days later a short, curly-headed young fellow of about twenty-five, with steel-rimmed spectacles and an intense, studious face, called on me. He told me his plans. He had about four hundred pesos to invest and figured that with this amount we could rent a couple of office rooms down town, buy furniture, and do enough advertising to get started. We both should have pupils to turn into the school.

We worked out the practical details and ended by becoming tremendously enthusiastic. The very next day we found two large rooms on Independencia and Lopez, right round the corner from the fashionable German club at which I had descended the fateful night of my arrival. Lights, furniture, black-boards were installed, and the "English Institute" was born. Our place was not elegant enough for any great opening success, but we attracted enough pupils to increase our incomes and gradually improve the appearance of the school. In less than six months after my arrival in Mexico City as a ragged beggar I was making double what I had earned at the Standard Oil Company in Richmond, California, and I had plenty of free time for writing and amusement and study.

III

I particularly loved to take trips out to the suburbs and adjacent towns. Half an hour in an auto bus would land me in Guadalupe Hidalgo, with its churches, its holy wells, and its

chapel-crowned hill of Tepeyac. On December twelfth this town is the centre for Mexico's greatest religious holiday, in honour of the Virgin of Guadalupe, who freed the Mexicans from the hated Spanish yoke.

On the dawn of the twelfth a year after my arrival George and I set out for this greatest of New World Meccas. The long road, lined with black and white poplars, leading out from Mexico City to this town of Guadalupe was already a river of bobbing sombreros, carrying in its tide hilariously eager pilgrims, coal-eyed *niñas* in dust-dragging skirts, and swart-faced adults. Once, I am told, this vast *romería* was made slowly and on the knees, with lengthy prayers before each of the fourteen chapels along the route — the ever-celebrated fourteen stations of the cross. But now it is made with song and jostling and jest; the whole way was now lined with venders of *dulces* and candied fruits, of cheap jewellery, long barbaric ear-rings, amber beads, and combs glistening like fire; red lemonade and "cured" pulque; bananas from Tabasco, drunk zapotes that seem all juice, "pop-corn" made out of tiny grass seeds and brown syrup, and pine-apples sliced into golden wedges. As we neared the densely crowded town, religious objects predominated: man-high candles, garishly twisted, decorated with miraculous biblical scenes or pictures of the Santísima Virgin; *gorditas de la Virgen*, holy sweet-cakes, almond-shaped, made from the meal of the big Cacahuatzintle corn; rosaries of carved wood, of glass, of tin, of silver, even of the fretted gold work from far-off Yucatan; aluminum medallions stamped with the Virgin; tiny opera-glasses carved out of bone, no bigger than a penny slot and with pin-hole openings that revealed magnified images of picturesque local panoramas.

We passed through a twisted lane behind the cathedral among green and pink houses and ascended the winding stone steps to the Hill of Tepeyac. Pausing in the shade of a carved

stone sail, set in the wall by sailors saved at sea by their appeal to their native Virgin, we gazed down upon the outspread town. Its flat many-coloured roofs were cracked, eaten into by cactus and chayote vines. The rolling *techo* of the cathedral, with its four blunt towers, was picturesquely framed in false-pepper branches. Narrow streets rayed out in all directions.

As we continued to ascend to the Capilla del Cerrito, the vast City of Mexico sprawled on the plain far to the south. The huge cathedral on the Zocalo loomed up imposingly. The whole sweeping panorama of the Anahuac Valley unfolded; the remote, frosty peaks of Popocatepetl and Ixtacihuatl, dim in the glimmering, horizon haze; closer at hand, the arching shore of Lake Texcoco, its surface pure silver — a crumbling Spanish aqueduct — the long march of the hills. —

And we went out to Xochimilco, swinging past a brown, crumbling church on a neglected hill, down a cobbled road lined with cactus, through the lanes of adobe houses and fenced corrals, past the huge cathedral to the canals and floating gardens — the Venice of Mexico, where we hired a *chalupa*, decked with a gay pavilion, and a solemn Indian poled us about between the floating gardens of bright-leaved corn and carnations and golden poppies — mile after mile. — Bowers — restaurants — dancing — native girls —

To Los Remedios, the white church on the far hill beyond Atzacapotzalco — the lofty Spanish aqueduct and watch-towers —

To Ixtapalapa, gray and brown and quaintly dreaming on the flower-decked flank of the volcanic mountains —

To the spring fiesta of Santa Anita, a great, throbbing crowd of flower-decked pagans surging between the lunch stands, the *puestos*, the gambling-halls, the side-shows, the

wild dance halls — *charro* contests, boatraces, games, fireworks —

To aristocratic San Angel — winding walls — great masses of bougainvillæa. — There in the Monastery of Carmen I met a charming old priest in a library of parchment-bound books, quaint old tomes, holy and profane: "Data on the proper treatment of wives, A compendium of instructions for divers places and circumstances as to the best means for curbing the unholy whims of the sinful sex. Madrid, 1504" —

To Tacuba and Atzacapotzalco to dig with an old archæologist in the kitchen-middens of ten thousand years ago — queer bowls — incense burners — a phallic seal-ring —

To the vast pyramids of Teotihuacán along the Road of the Dead — carved jade — black pottery with white designs — old idols — and a dinner in a natural cave —

To Tetzcotzingo, the summer palace of Netzahualtcoatl, the great Texcocan poet king, of whose pulque taste Evangelina had told me — stone steps carved in the hill — sacrificial stones — old baths — carved toads — a great panorama of lake and gardens and lance and far-flung cathedrals —

To Tepotzotlán, the site of the gorgeous, plateresque monastery and chapel, set in the heart of rolling, maguey-dotted hills —

To Coyoacán, a bower of verdure and flowers — the second church in America — the homes of Cortés and Alvarado, the mighty *conquistadores* —

To Cuernavaca, a winding, hill-perched town, where gurgling waters flow eternally through rock-bound subterranean passage-ways —

On horseback to Tepotztlán, that looks out through huge, volcanic gates upon the city of Cuautla and the wide meadows of the Yautepec River — the home of old kings and gods — rich with legend and religious drama —



PYRAMID OF THE SUN AT TEOTIHUACÁN



THE GRAND STAIRS

And up to Amecameca, the little arched town that sits at the foot of the two enormous volcanoes, Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl, in an eternal attitude of wistful prayer — the churches on the Sacred Mount — horseshoe arches — gurgling streams —

And Tlaxcala, dreaming in the rugged mountains, dreaming of the days when it battled Cortés and the Aztecs — the long walk up to the snow-white sanctuary of Ocotlán — terraced hills — gardens — repose —

And how I remember that trip up to Toluca — cold, quivering Toluca — and an afternoon of beer-drinking with a beautiful Indian girl, sister of an artist friend. The following day we hiked up to the foot of a volcano, to an Indian town where the pagan festivals had merged into the Catholic ritual, and Indians were doing bizarre dances in the arched nave, to the eerie tune of one-stringed violins, in strange jackets and breeches, with masks and torches and guttural yells. And then a trip up to the blue, indigo lake in the dead cone of the volcano and back again, horses sliding on their haunches to Toluca; the long auto ride in the rain over the mountains down to Mexico, with a stop to eat at a crowded, smoky little Indian house, reeking with pulque and native music from crude guitars, and the final dip over the rim of the Anáhuac Valley with the great, rain-drenched panorama once more before our eyes, and me dreaming dreams, with a tired, lovely head on my shoulder.

CHAPTER XL

LUCRE

I

My acquaintanceship was steadily widening. One day in summer one of the members of the board of trustees of the American School suggested that I make application for a position in the high school. I presented my credentials and was appointed at once. In a few months I was raised from teacher to principal.

The work occupied only the mornings, so that by taking afternoon and evening classes I could keep on with the Institute.

To do my writing, to which I had now dedicated myself in good earnest (I had started my book on Mexico), I rose at five or six in the morning and wrote until nearly eight; many times I also spent the fag-end of the evening at the typewriter.

About this time some of the prominent club women of the American colony asked me to give lectures on English literature once a week, and to this end a Shakespeare Club was formed, which met in the homes of the various members and lasted as long as I stayed in Mexico.

In addition I was frequently called upon to do special tutoring in mathematics for children expecting to enter universities in the States. So that all in all I was busy sixteen to eighteen hours a day, and enjoying it.

As though I were not sufficiently occupied, another op-

portunity presented itself at this time. I had made the acquaintance of one of the officers of President Carranza's personal staff, and one day when we were in one of the cafés drinking cocktails, he suggested that I give the staff special lessons in military English. Hardly had I accepted when George Poltiol suddenly decided to go back to the States. He willed the Institute to me for a hundred pesos, the remainder of his original investment. I could find no satisfactory person to tend to things properly during the hours when I was obliged to be absent; so I sold it out, furniture, pupils and goodwill, for about six hundred pesos.

My new work with President Carranza's staff afforded me an opportunity to meet many interesting military types. The classes were held in the offices of the Secretary of War, General Barragán (General Urquizo was acting minister in Barragán's absence), which were located above the north entrance of the Palacio Nacional opposite the street leading down to the national university. My class-room was the reception *salon* between the offices of General Urquizo and General Mariel. About twenty young officers attended—a wholly barrack-room crowd.

Here I met most of the leading military lights of the Carranza régime, Generals Murguía (short years later in Tepehuanes, the Durango city where I had been treated so hostitably), Mariel, Diéguez, Mújica, Sánchez, Aguilar, and many others, most of whom have since been shot in various prisings.

The most amusing to me, I think, was General Mariel, a big-bodied, black-bearded brute with a feline treacherousness. Some months later he was killed with Carranza in the mountains of Vera Cruz but in the days when I knew him he was the very essence and excrement of militarism, more important than a puffed toad. Frequently he strode from his office to that of Urquizo, who was himself a nasty little vul-

garian, with a heavy yet hurried tread, causing my class to rise precipitately to stand at attention. This happened time after time. Though I always kept on talking or writing on the black-board, this interruption was very annoying to me, and one day I requested him to excuse the class from standing at attention every time he passed through. He drew himself up with the air of a vaudeville comedian — braid and chest and insignia — to inform me with a sneer that I was very ignorant of military discipline. But thereafter he treated me with more punctilious courtesy than before — he was, in short, a typical silly, strutting Uniform, vanity-fed by mob adulation and the hysteria of over-sexed females.

I also met President Carranza several times. He was a white-haired patriarch, without much warmth, chilly and inscrutable behind his flowing whiskers and blue spectacles. He always received me in such wise that his face remained in the shadow, mine in the light. His office had statues of Napoleon and Diaz, giving me a subtle clue to understanding his inflexible obstinacy. He saw the explanation of the failure of Madero, the first leader of the Revolution, in Madero's clemency. Carranza, himself, had determined to rule with an iron hand, at a time when force should have expressed itself in cunning rather than overt power. As a result he merely drove the ablest men, including Alvaro Obregón, from his side and became surrounded with the cheap military clique I have described, men without principles or patriotism, whose one desire was loot and more loot.

II

Life was vivid, yet some of my contacts were rather insipid, above all many of those in the American colony. The American who comes to Mexico is too frequently a colourless nobody whom race prejudices have filled with

strutting pretensions; or he is a barbarian or an adventurer trying to forget his origin. In Mexico the American who at home would be a mere train conductor learns to despise the Mexican, becomes a superintendent, a school trustee, puts on a dress suit, swells at the country club, learns to play golf, but never quite conceals the lack of education and culture underneath. The best and most companionable are those who do not try to put on ludicrous trained-monkey airs, but retain their true vagrant spirit and can be taken for what they are. But by and large the Americans I have met in Mexico (with some remarkable exceptions) when speaking Spanish will ask you to sit down in the past subjunctive tense or commit some worse *faux pas*; will call the Mexicans from whom they should be learning something "yellow-bellies," and do their travelling in Hotel Regis in Mexico City, and are quite unfamiliar with the country and its ways, with Spanish-Mexican history, literature, and traditions. These people, who believe in race superiority, who are decades behind in politics, fully convinced that everything in the United States and elsewhere in the world should be run as it was back in Podunk, Arkansas, twenty years before — these people will never learn the heart, the spirit, the soul of the Mexican people.

My polite contacts with the good women of the Shakespeare Club to whom I gave lectures, the gossip of the tea-cups, did, however, have the good effect of driving me to drink. Association with them was quite too prophylactic, and my fondness for good, honest, low-brow association would violently reassert itself. Perhaps I am just using the good ladies as an excuse for youthful exuberance and curiosity; but, at any rate, after my talk to them I would go down to a cheap, dingy Chinese café on my beloved Dolores Street to drink coffee and "chew the rag" with a bunch of American rough-necks and Mexicans till late at night. Perhaps my giv-

ing these ladies talks was the self-same affectation in me for which I condemned them, but after hearing myself called gushingly: "My dear Doctor, what an excellent talk you gave on *Romeo and Juliet!*" reaction promptly set in, though I well knew that such varied and, in some cases, disreputable contacts would jeopardize my position in the American school.

Among the subterranean group at the café was an American writer, now a Broadway dramatist; and we had many a wild night together. One evening we ran into each other on the corner and began arguing vehemently about the effects of industry upon literature and ended up by going into a *cantina* for a couple of Havaneros, and then beer. By this time our tongues had become quite loose, and we were in a hilarious exalted mood. We walked along under the clear night sky, discussing everything from Freudianism to the Immaculate Conception. We grew gayer and gayer and suddenly found ourselves down among the dance halls and houses of San Miguel and Cuauhtemotzín Streets. We rushed in and out of one place and another, dancing with the *habitués*, shouting and joyous. We finally strayed into town again and had a round of mint juleps that lifted us to the stars. On Gante Street we spied two silk-serge flags, one American, the other Mexican, draped across the wide entrance of an American farm-machinery company. On an impulse we grabbed the two flags and were just making off with our spoils when a policeman came running across the street, shouting:

"*Las banderas! las banderas!*"

We started to run, then turned and grappled with him, knocking him down. Thoroughly alarmed now and a bit sobered, we beat it around the corner, stuffing the flags under our coats as we ran. We heard the shouts and police whistle of the man behind us, and saw ahead of us, coming up the street, the swinging light of another policeman. We ducked



GUADALUPE:
RELIGIOUS CAPITAL OF MEXICO



THE CATHEDRAL IN MEXICO CITY

into the rear entrance of the Grand Hotel, walked sedately through the restaurant into the lobby, and out the main entrance on Uruguay Street. Doubling over on a side street, we came to the Hotel Independencia and took refuge in the rooms of two acquaintances on the top floor.

We burst in on them triumphantly, singing and waving our flags. The two fellows woke up amazed and then became so envious and excited at our hilarity that they piled out of bed and dressed. We all went out again, had some beer and sandwiches at a little restaurant, then looked around for another *cantina*. It was late now, and everything was closed, per regulation. But finally on Aquiles Serdán Street we saw a light inside a *cantina* and after much pleading were grudgingly admitted.

Here we sat down in one of the private booths, drinking, singing, talking, holding the waitresses on our laps. We were joined by a Spanish anarchist, a most hilarious fellow, who sang us anarchist songs until morning. Then the doors of the place were flung open and the dawn came bellying in — a cold disillusioning mist. The two boys in the hotel took two of the waitresses up to their rooms with them. I went on to one of the public baths, had half a dozen cups of strong coffee, changed my clothes, and reached the high school at exactly eight o'clock.

My stolen flag I later gave to Rosa, the Mexican girl with whom I went to Toluca, to make a kimono of; and I must say that a Mexican girl draped in an American flag did prove rather effective.

CHAPTER XLI

LUCIFER FALLS AGAIN

I

JUST a few weeks before the success of the Obregón re-vindicating revolution, after Obregón had escaped from a faked-up treason charge to Balsas, one by one the officers of Carranza's staff began disappearing from the class, without any explanation. By the time Obregón's troops were closing in on the capital only three of my pupils remained. The others had all gone out to join the revolution. Later I was to see some of my ex-pupils in the victorious parade of Obregón troops that swept down the Paseo de la Reforma. Of the three pupils who remained in my class, two remained loyal, fleeing with Carranza when he deserted the capital, and remaining by his side until he was assassinated in the wild mountains of Vera Cruz. Later these returned to Mexico City and, through back-door connections, were reinstated in better positions than they had lost. The third became the personal aide of Treviño, one of the rebel officers, who became Minister of Commerce and Labour. Another young fellow was named head of the aviation school, and still another was placed in charge of the Mexico City headquarters of General Pablo González, one of the most important participants in the Obregón turnover.

Those last days before the arrival of the rebel army were hectic. Little authentic news came through the press, but wild rumour was rampant. Dramatic defeats of the Carranza

forces sifted through: the annihilation of the crack army of General Diéguez; the fall of Zacatecas, Guanajuato, Guadalajara, Querétaro; tawdry yellow journals appeared with flaring scareheads; the cafés buzzed with talk; long files of cavalry rattled down the avenues to take the field. One morning a lurid poster appeared on the walls of Mexico City, signed by General Murguía, Commandant of the Forces of the Valley of Mexico, that the Government would never falter but would maintain itself to the bitter end.

But up in the Secretaría, where I gave my class, I found everything in wildest confusion. The government was attempting to pack up its effects and skip out to Vera Cruz, still held by General Cándido Aguilar, the loyal son-in-law of the President. Men were tearing in and out of the offices with telegrams, orders, news. Bearded, travel-stained officers, in from the front strode nervously to and fro.

The War offices were being stripped; soldiers and officers were bawling about like so many calves; everything was being hauled out: old bugles and broken drums, hoary with dust; pins, furniture, type-writers, files — a long stream of heaped-up objects was being passed from hand to hand, down to the lower floor and loaded on motor trucks. This saturnalia of mad last-minute packing was going on in every public building. The Government had completely lost its head.

Down in the train-yards fourteen trains were waiting to transport the departing Government and its effects to Vera Cruz. There, too, everything was in the wildest disorder. Great ragged heaps of records, files, furniture, stood along the tracks waiting to be loaded — even the treasury of the nation: great open coffers full of gold coins had been flung down haphazardly, spilling their valuable contents over the runway under the very heels of the frantic train-hands and pacing officials.

The train bearing President Carranza did not leave until the next morning. I hired an auto and dashed out to Guadalupe Hidalgo, the first stop after Mexico City, where I saw Carranza's patriarchal figure on the rear of the presidential car, leaning over the gilded grill-work, grandiloquently flinging coins to scrambling Indians.

A week later he was assassinated in the mountains of Vera Cruz, and I recalled then those two statuettes of Napoleon and Diaz that I had seen in his office, and pictured him galloping over the wild mountains, his white beard blown in the wind, driven by some strange freak of destiny down to an ignominious grave. He died in that traditional elegant fashion that Mexicans love to die in.

There too, in Guadalupe, I saw the last Government train wrecked by a mad engine sent hurtling after it down the tracks by the rebels, a box car of soldiers smashed to smithereens, a wild dash of cavalry up the hills; Red Cross autos whizzing to the capital with the wounded.

Rebel troops streamed into Mexico City. Fifteen minutes after the last Government trains pulled out, horsemen began arriving, straight from the hills, galloping wildly, bent low over their lean, wiry ponies. They circled with thundering hoofs, guns at the hip, into the Plaza Constitucional — Zapatistas, Yaquis, Tarascas, Huachinangos, all hoary with dust, weary from long hours in the saddle — bearded faces streaked with sweat. Long whirling columns of cavalry — handsome devils in wide sombreros and red kerchiefs — rattled down the paved avenues. The revolution was over.

II

A great mass of people swarmed into the Plaza Constitucional, fifty thousand of them massed in the great central plaza. The bronze bells of the cathedral rang out over the

assembled multitude, a ceaseless, wind-tossed tolling that continued all that day and far into the night.

I wedged my way into this enormous throng that had trampled over grass and shrub and fence and was jammed solid into the enormous quadrangle. Bit by bit, shoving my way, hauled about, at times almost swept off my feet, deafened by the roar of bells above me and the cries of the crowd, I managed, somehow, to get close to the balcony of the National Palace. General Treviño stepped out and in a few brief words read the announcement of the deposition of Carranza and the substitution of the new revolutionary Government.

No sooner had he finished speaking than the crowd began fighting to leave the plaza. At that moment, about three yards away, I caught sight of a familiar face. A girl in a modish blue hat and spring dress. Evangelina! My companion of the train trip!

I fought to get over to her. But the vast heaving crowd had become as irresistible as an ocean. Arms pinned to my sides, I was swept along, a helpless chip on the powerful human tide. Evangelina was lost to sight! I never saw her again.

Some weeks later I said good-bye to my former landlady who had been so kind to me — Doña Concha, and the two children — dropped in at Avellaneda's for dinner, joked with Guadalupe and Consuelo, flattered Doña Teresa, and after a long, tearful parting from Rosa (to whom I had given the American flag), I bought a steerage ticket to Spain, the land of the *Hidalgos*.

A NOTE ON THE TYPE IN
WHICH THIS BOOK IS SET

The type in which this book has been set (on the Linotype) is based on the design of Caslon. It is generally conceded that William Caslon (1692-1766) brought the old-style letter to its highest perfection and while certain modifications have been introduced to meet changing printing conditions, the basic design of the Caslon letters has never been improved. The type selected for this book is a modern adaptation rather than an exact copy of the original. Caslon's letters are noted for their extreme legibility.



SET UP, ELECTROTYPED, PRINTED AND
BOUND BY THE PLIMPTON PRESS,
NORWOOD, MASS. • PAPER MANU-
FACTURED BY W. C. HAMILTON
& SONS, MIQUON, PA. AND
FURNISHED BY W. F. ETH-
ERINGTON & CO.,
NEW YORK

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